

SYNERGY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 2: NO.1

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

WORLD CINEMA ISSUE

FILMING KIWIS: NEW ZEALAND CINEMA

Special Feature

HORROR WORLD CINEMA

From Extreme to Horror to Comedy.

WEIRD & WONDERFUL WORLD CINEMA

Cult Films from around the Globe !

WORLD CINEMA REVIEWS

World Cinema from the Thought Provoking to Art-House,
Surreal to Informative...

GIALLO CINEMA

Dario Argento Feature

**THE INDEPENDENT CINEMA OF ERIC
STANZE**

HORROR

CULT

DARK ART

MUSIC

ART-HOUSE

FICTION

COLLECTABLES

THE DARK SIDE

FREE SPEECH

WORLD CINEMA

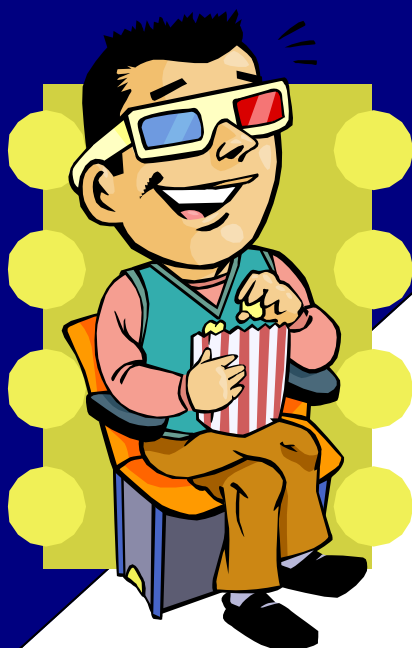
THE
**QUIET
EARTH**

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Robert Black



REVIEWERS

Synergy Review Team includes: Robert Black,
Bob Estreich, Jeremy & Renata Kong & various
freelance reviewers.

A special thanks to Bob Estreich for his help
and assistance with reviews and articles, I
doubt Synergy could have continued without
his ongoing support.



Welcome to the first issue of Synergy for 2009. We have decided to occasionally produce special issues which focus on key genres or themes within cinema, this issue is on World Cinema, from the classic to the strange, from the extreme to the insightful.

While our special issues continue to include a wide array of general reviews, news and content, they will also include special reviews sections related to the given subject. In this issue we have a range of special features on World Cinema including one on New Zealand Cinema and another on the well respected Beginners Guide to World Cinema series from Madman Entertainment (among others).

The DVD reviews section in this issue still covers a diverse range of titles, while there is also a number of special sections including "Weird World Cinema" which focuses on cult and horror World Cinema and World Cinema which covers World Cinema and Art-House films from around the globe.

Sadly, many people see World Cinema as a genre which is difficult to relate to. The reality could not be farther from the truth. World Cinema comes in all shapes and sizes, from the sleazy and bizarre to the refined and cultured. From the violence and sex of Italian Giallo to reflections on current issues, gender and politics. We have tried to create an issue which represents the diversity of world cinema as well as including a few surprises.

I think our "Weird World Cinema" section is especially fun, showing just how bizarre, eccentric and downright off the wall world cinema can be. These are films which will give any exploitation, cult or horror film a run for their money !

We are sure you will enjoy this issue and we have lots of interesting things in store for you in 2009 !

**Editorial Team
Synergy**



INFORMATION



Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions. The R description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray: We only review All Region and Region B titles.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is [blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com), it includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

Web: <http://www.blu-ray.com>

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

For international films from the US there are many suppliers including www.amazon.com.

For international films from the UK there are many suppliers including www.amazon.co.uk.

For rare Asian titles we recommend Asian Cult DVD (<http://asiancult.com>)

For other rare titles we recommend Diabolik DVD (<http://www.diabolikdvd.com>).

There are a wide variety of retail outlets in Australia. You can compare Australian prices at: DVD Plaza (<http://www.dvdplaza.com.au>)

We have no business relationship with any retailer and only recommend them for your information. Please make an informed decision before purchasing from any store and compare prices.



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NEWS IN BRIEF



Apex Magazine: How the Future will Remember the Past.

Apex Magazine is delighted to announce that the April issue will be a special one devoted to the concept of how the future will remember the past, and edited by award-winning writer and Apex author Michael A. Burstein.

"Ever since we published Michael's collection *I Remember the Future*, we've been hoping that Michael could find the time to edit an issue," said Jason Sizemore, publisher and editor-in-chief of Apex Magazine. "Michael's looking for stories that evoke the same themes that tie his own stories together, such as the slipperiness of history and the dangers of forgetting the past."

Burstein will be reading for this special issue of Apex Magazine from January 15th until March 15th. He said, "I want to thank Apex for this opportunity to edit an issue of the magazine. I'm looking forward to seeing the stories come in, and I'm hoping for some powerful ones that will stay with me for a long time."

Reference:

Web: <http://www.apexbookcompany.com>

The Australian Atheist bus campaign in Perspective

The growing list of countries running or intending to run Atheist adverts on buses are Britain, France, Spain, Italy, the USA, Canada, and Ireland. Places most likely to disallow displays of Atheists advertisements on buses are Australia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Africa and other politically/religious dysfunctional regimes.

President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc, David Nicholls said, "Bus company advertising executives must realise by now they have made a hasty assessment in banning AFA adverts on public metropolitan buses.

If they are incapable of altering this decision, the government bodies in control of public transport should step in and change it for them.

Australia's international reputation as a country where freedom of expression thrives is under severe scrutiny. The ensuing condemnation is widespread, as it should be.

All of this because of these frightening words, "Atheism – Celebrate reason!"

We are not the fair and progressive country we thought we were. Isn't that more than sad?"

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Private Mail Bag 6
MAITLAND SA 5573

Web: <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au>

Death Ray and Maya Partner to bring Dark Horse Comic El Zombo to the Big Screen

Death Ray Films and Maya Entertainment team up to bring the acclaimed Dark Horse comic book *El Zombo Fantasma* to the big screen.

El Zombo Fantasma, published by Dark Horse Comics in 2005, created by David Wilkins and Kevin Munroe, will be produced under the Death Ray Films banner recently formed by Chris Patton, Kevin Munroe and Robert Sanchez who are currently in production on *War Monkeys*.

The story follows the mysterious murder of the world's most notorious Mexican wrestler who bargains his way out of an eternity of fiery damnation by returning to Los Angeles to play guardian angel to a troublesome teen, Belisa Montoya. He soon discovers that the teen is not what she seems and that their fates have been intertwined for centuries.

Death Ray Films and Maya Entertainment will bring tales of the undead masked wrestler to multiple mediums starting with the live action feature followed by a new animated series.

Kevin Munroe will write and direct with Chris Patton and Robert Sanchez producing. Wilkins and Munroe will co-produce. Mike Richardson will executive produce for Dark Horse Entertainment.

Jose Martinez and Kellvin Chavez will produce along with Academy Award nominee Moctesuma Esparza who will executive produce for Maya Entertainment.

"Zombo started years ago as just a geeky idea between two friends who worked at the same video game company," says Munroe.

"But Dave and I always knew that the property had a broader appeal than just its publishing roots, and now we'll see it finally reach an entirely new audience. I'm thrilled to be a part of creating this new breed of superhero for the big screen."

"As a Cuban-American in this industry, I see El Zombo as a unique property that will not only showcase Latinos but also appeal to all audiences. It has action, romance, redemption and wrestling, it's a Latin Hellboy," says Robert Sanchez. "It's the prefect date movie!"

"El Zombo is an extremely cool superhero and it's tremendous, pile-driving fun," says Kellvin Chavez.

"As a fan of wrestling, I used to watch 'Santo, el Enmascarado de Plata' one of the most famous Mexican free wrestlers, so I was excited by this project."

"We are excited to work with Death Ray and Dark Horse on El Zombo as it furthers our goal of bringing Latino themes and Latino talent to the commercial market," says Jose Martinez Jr. for Maya.

"We plan to blow this out in a big way so that everyone can enjoy this awesome idea.

Death Ray Films, Maya Entertainment and Dark Horse Entertainment.

Source: Dark Horse Entertainment

"BLACK DEVIL DOLL"

"A young, moist, buxom teen vixen finds herself hurled into an odyssey of forbidden sex and unspeakable violence after an innocent evening dabbling in the occult. What started as a simple child's game has now become a fight for her life! What is this evil that she has summoned from beyond?

And why does it have a fro? What kind of horrific acts will she be subjected to? And what price will her super-hot, half-nude friends have to pay?

But more importantly, how much Caucasian blood will have to be shed to stop....the BLACK DEVIL DOLL?!!!"

Black Devil Doll is a full length feature...

From the sick and twisted mind of Shawn Lewis, former editor and publisher of Blackest Heart Magazine and the creative force behind Rotten Cotton Graphics, comes the sleaziest Blaxploitation Horror film ever envisioned.

Five naive young women are raped, abused, tortured, and killed(?) by an evil jive-ass talking ventriloquist doll possessed by the spirit of an executed black militant death row inmate.

Who will survive?
What will be left of them? Will their virginity be intact?

It's Chucky meets Dolemite in this violent, misogynistic, sleazy horror film directed by up and coming genre director Jonathan Lewis.





Not intended for children. Black Devil Doll features totally awesome scenes of murder and rape! No one under 17 will be admitted!

Black Devil Doll certainly pushes the boundaries of bad taste and will prove an absolute delight to any exploitation cinema fan. Combining sexploitation, blaxploitation and the pure strangeness of a murderous puppet has got to be a real winner!

**HE'S A
MUTHAFUCKIN'
PUPPET!**

Black Devil Doll is opening on April 17th in Los Angeles

and then will have a theatrical season at various cinemas throughout America until later in the year when the DVD will be released.

The reviews thus far have suggested this film will live up to all expectations. Comments have ranged from it being uncontrollable lewd and offensive to being filled with racial stereotypes and exploitation.

I especially liked the reviewer who said he felt "his retinas had been raped" by watching this film!

Everything about Black Devil Doll shows the producers know how to make a cult classic. The posters and promotional art look like classic blaxploitation pieces and the previews play on this heritage. Just look at how cool the posters are— they are the epitome of bad taste cult cinema.

The puppet has such a resonance in horror and cult cinema from such classics as Devil Doll (1964) and Magic (1978) to the pure and outrageous sex of Let my Puppets Come (1976) and let's not forget Meet the Feebles (1989) - the Peter Jackson Classic.

This is going to be a film to watch out for!

Devil Doll Website

www.blackdevildoll.com/

Devil Doll Myspace Page

<http://www.myspace.com/blackdevildolldvd>

Trailers

<http://www.blackdevildoll.com/trailers.html>

Unrated and Rated Trailers in various formats are available.

IRON MAIDEN: FLIGHT 666

British heavy rock legends, Iron Maiden, in association with EMI Records, Universal (USA), Banger Productions and Arts Alliance Media, announce that they will be releasing a feature length documentary film into cinemas worldwide on April 21st 2009.

Entitled Iron Maiden: Flight 666 the movie follows the band on the first leg of their Somewhere Back in Time World Tour in February and March of 2008 as they experienced the most ambitious and adventurous tour in rock history.

The Maiden tour plan was something that had never been attempted before on such a grand scale. Circumnavigating the globe, the band flew in a specially customised Boeing 757 airliner with their crew and 12 tons of music and stage equipment on board, playing 23 sold out stadium and arena shows in Asia, Australia and North, Central and South America in just 45 days.

They played in 13 countries, also landing in Azerbaijan and Papua New Guinea en route for fuel stops, travelling 70,000km and performing to almost half a million fans – a schedule that was only made possible by having their own “magic carpet” enabling them to go where they wanted with all the key elements of band, crew and equipment on board one plane, which was christened Ed Force One.

Even more remarkable was that lead singer and Airline Captain Bruce Dickinson was not only to perform 23 shows, but he was also the pilot flying the plane for much of the way. The band were accompanied everywhere by award winning documentary makers Banger Productions from Toronto in Canada, who have received international critical acclaim for their previous movies "Metal, A Headbangers Journey" and

Ed Force One !



Bruce Dickinson in the Cockpit

recently "Global Metal". Filmmakers Scot McFadyen and Sam Dunn and their team bring an intimate behind the scenes view of this remarkable journey, with a close look at the logistics involved and following Team Maiden in the cockpit, on the plane and on and offstage, getting to the heart of this innovative global adventure of a band that has very rarely even let cameras backstage before.

Shot in High Definition, the movie will be screened in 2K digital cinema, with superb 5.1 surround sound, mixed by the bands producer Kevin 'Caveman' Shirley.

Iron Maiden: Flight 666 brings to the screen all the drama, excitement and hysteria that followed the band around the world every time their Boeing 757 'Ed Force One' touched down in a new country.

The film documents the intensity of the punishing show schedules, the struggle with the time zones, the pressures of ensuring that every performance matched the energy of the many thousands of ecstatic and expectant fans from many cultural backgrounds, unusual angles from the spectacular shows.....and of course the fun had on the way!

Iron Maiden: Flight 666 is an honest and revealing portrait of one of the worlds most successful rock bands, a must see for their millions of fans around the world and anyone else with an interest in Rock Music and World Tours, giving an inspirational account of the chaotic and often humorous world of a band touring the four corners of the world in the most extraordinary way.

For information on the release of IRON Maiden: Flight 666, teasers, trailers and news from the current tour please visit <http://www.ironmaiden.com>

RED CIRCLE MOVIES

Red Circle Movies is the brainchild of Director Gregory Caiafa and produces films which are challenging, visceral and beyond the mainstream. Intruder is their first release and they have just completed their second, John Hook.

Intruder is an old school slasher story with an extremely dark moral perspective. It involves a paranoid schizophrenic, her boyfriend, and others stalked and killed at a secluded estate by a clown-masked killer. Unlike many of the 80's slashers and 90's self-referential horrors, Intruder is extremely solemn and tonally closer to a dark drama than a tits and arse movie. It was a conscious risk the filmmaker took to help separate himself from the plethora of slashers that hit the marketplace. Intruder was largely filmed in October of 2007.

Intruder received a solid opportunity for foreign and domestic distribution from a credible company based on the rough cut, but Caiafa decided to do some pick-ups to enhance the film's "market aspects" (nudity and gore). Caiafa shot an additional two days in July of '08 and had a finished picture by the beginning of September '08. Intruder stars Christena Daggrell and Jack Reiling, as well as Alexandra Grossi, Brian Ish, Arda Itez, and Michelle Van Schyndel in smaller parts. Intruder was written in about two weeks and specifically for the resources that Caiafa had at the time. He had originally put together a fantastic script for my first project titled "Dead of Night", which was a haunted house/ slasher/ grindhouse hybrid, but quickly discovered the

budget would have been about ten times the available budget. However, it worked out in the end, as it provoked the interest of a producer/distributor who dug it enough to offer a distribution commitment for "Dead of Night" based solely on the script. This puts the horse before the cart and makes assembling the necessary budget a thousand times easier. Intruder will hit the marketplace within the next few months. Red Circle Movies have been in negotiations with a few credible distributors with aggressive business models, who get their stuff into the major retailers as well as Netflix.

John Hook follows a serial killer over two days on Staten Island. The titular character is taken in by two sisters and is soon introduced to a low-level gangster who recognizes his tendencies and seeks to exploit them. The film is character driven and performance orientated and is a harder sell as straight up horror, but it seems to work well. John Hook stars Chris Russell and Alexandra Grossi, with Michelle Van Schyndel, Brian Ish, John Schaub, Nate Rubin, and Joe Albert Lima in strong supporting roles. Most of the actors come from a theatre background and the performances are extremely organic. One of the things that Caiafa notes is that the people he works with feel they've done some of their very best stuff and are pleased to collaborate on other projects. Remember these names cause these folks have bright futures ahead of them!

John Hook was filmed throughout April and May of 2008 and is presently in post production. It was more of a band-of-brothers production, filmed Guerrilla style on Staten Island and New Jersey.

John's a bit of a biter !

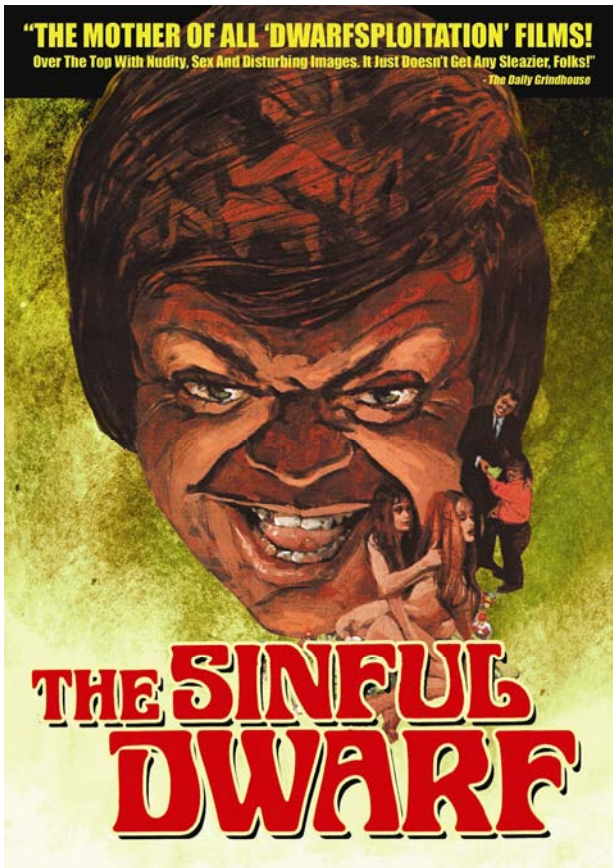


John Hook was written in about ten days and was based on Caiafa's desire to do a gothic horror tale with a contemporary spin. When Caiafa started pre-production, he decided it worked better as a character study and did a re-write.

John Hook will enjoy a limited pre-release through Red Circle Movies beginning in March of 2009, after which the aim is to place it in a few film festivals.

Red Circle Movies

<http://www.redcirclemovies.com/>



Last month we reviewed the Euro release of Sinful Dwarf from Another World Entertainment. This month, however, Severin has gone a step further and has found a print of impeccable quality.

**SEVERIN TO RELEASE 'THE SINFUL DWARF'
ON DVD FOR FIRST TIME EVER IN AMERICA
ON MARCH 30TH**

Long-Reviled 'Mother Of All Dwarfsplotation Films' Promises To Incite Huge Ire From Little People

Severin Films has announced the March 30th release of THE SINFUL DWARF, the infamous 1973 Danish-made/London-lensed shocker that has been called "perhaps the sleaziest film in EuroCult history." Events surrounding this first ever North American DVD release are scheduled to include a rare theatrical screening at Austin's Alamo Draft House on April 3rd, as well as national protests from various outraged Little People's organizations. Severin's restoration of the still-controversial movie was made possible by the recent discovery of a pristine 35mm print found hidden in a janitor's closet at The Danish Film Institute.

"A young bride," promised the original U.S. ads, "left alone to the lewd passions of an evil dwarf!"

Former kiddie-show host Torben Bille stars in this EuroSleaze classic as a diminutive degenerate who imprisons drugged teenage runaways for use as sex slaves in the attic of his elderly alcoholic showgirl mother's decrepit rooming house...and that's just the first ten minutes. In their December 12th 1973 review, Variety condemned the film as "repulsive", further declaring "Torben leers and lurches like a demented Bette Davis." Over the past three-plus decades, the movie's repellent international reputation was furthered by infrequent screenings of heavily censored fourth-generation bootleg videos as well as a recent viral campaign that shocked even the most jaded of fringe film bloggers. "Best. Plot. Ever." wrote CinemalsKing.com. "This whole movie delivers the goods!" while Mania.com raved, "A must-view. After all, can one really go through life without having seen a movie called THE SINFUL DWARF?"

"THE SINFUL DWARF is a towering achievement in graphic depravity," says Carl Daft, co-founder and CEO of Severin Films. "With this release, Severin is officially going to Hell, and plans on taking as many EuroCult fans as we can with us." As for the large-scale protests threatened by various Little People's organizations, Daft is sanguine. "Clearly, THE SINFUL DWARF does not imply that all dwarves are pint-sized perverts with massive penchants for drug trafficking and sexual degeneracy. It would be like attacking Graham Greene for THE QUIET AMERICAN."

Severin Films was formed in May 2006 with offices in Los Angeles and London. Hailed as "cheerfully perverse folks" by The New York Times, the label is dedicated to restoring and releasing the most provocative and controversial features from around the world. Their previous releases include the unrated Director's Cut of GWENDOLINE starring Tawny Kitaen, recent lifetime Goya Award winner Jess Franco's classics MACUMBA SEXUAL and THE SEXUAL STORY OF O, Walerian Borowczyk's IMMORAL WOMEN, the two-volume limited-edition collections BLACK EMANUELLES BOX, and Enzo Castellari's action classic INGLOURIOUS BASTARDS, currently being remade by Quentin Tarantino. Their future releases include Oscar nominee Patrice Leconte's international hits THE HAIRDRESSER'S HUSBAND and THE PERFUME OF YVONNE on April 28th.

Web: <http://www.severin-films.com>

Filming Kiwis

A retrospective look at the film industry of New Zealand.

In a recent issue Synergy Magazine we featured a review of the movie "Not Quite Hollywood", a historical perspective of the early films made in Australia. The review reminded me fondly of my experiences with New Zealand movies (New Zealanders are known as "Kiwis" here in Australia). The first NZ movie, *Hinemoa*, was released in 1914, but their small industry almost disappeared after World War 2, swamped by the flood of cheap U.S. productions. They always had a steady production of documentaries and even short films, but the local industry was never big in mainstream cinema production.

In 1977 I was holidaying in NZ. On Saturday afternoons the whole country turned off the lights and went to sleep for the weekend, so we went to the movies. We saw "*Sleeping Dogs*", a new release starring an unknown actor named Sam Neill. It was his first movie, and the first recent NZ-made feature movie as well. It was quite a well made film, but very disturbing. Smith, a young Kiwi separated from his wife, has moved to a lonely farmhouse to sort out his life.

Around him, NZ is becoming a totalitarian state fuelled by riots and civil unrest due to oil shortages. The NZ Prime Minister is consolidating his hold on power by imposing martial law on the country, using the excuse "we will not be

held to ransom" (sounds familiar?). A cache of arms is found on the property and Smith is treated as a terrorist by the NZ anti-terrorist police.

The movie was prophetic, which is why it stuck in



Sam Neill



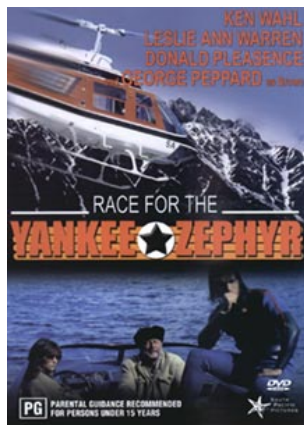
my mind – remember, this was long before anti-Vietnam protests, before the Kiwis even protested against a touring South African football team because of South Africa's apartheid policy. Kiwis just DIDN'T riot or demonstrate. NZ's Prime Minister at the time was Robert "Piggy" Muldoon, and the PM in *Sleeping Dogs* might have been Muldoon and Margaret Thatcher rolled into one. The movie never went overseas as far as I know, and real world events overtook the movie within the next twenty years.

Although the film was substantially home-grown, with very competent actors like Ian Mune and Sam Neill, NZ seemed to suffer from a "cultural cringe" that required a "name" overseas actor to play at least one major role in each film. Australia suffered from the same problem. In 1978 the New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage formed the New Zealand Film Commission Board. The Board offered tax concessions and some funding for home-grown and locally-produced films, thereby keeping the expertise in the country and helping it develop. Overseas funding was still necessary for any ambitious project.

Filming Kiwis by Bob Estreich

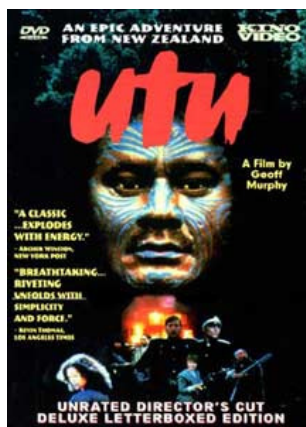
Filming Kiwis is the result of a life long obsession with New Zealand cinema. Bob is well known to Synergy readers as an erudite reviewer of both low brow cult films and world cinema. Bob is also quite an authority on antique telephones !





The next NZ film I saw was actually an Australian production made in 1980 in NZ, for the spectacular scenery and the tax breaks. Scenery has always been an attraction in NZ films – they have so much of it that it would be foolish not to use it. “*Race For The Yankee Zephyr*” was a great little adventure involving

a DC3 aircraft lost in the NZ Southern Alps during WW2. It was carrying a cargo of gold, and a local deer trapper stumbles across it. Another group is also looking for it, and violence ensues. The cultural cringe cut in and although the lead role was very ably filled by local Ken Wahl, David Hemmings did the direction and the chief “baddie” was George Peppard. Wahl’s partner in deer trapping was brilliantly played by Donald Pleasance, an actor I usually associated with darker parts, but he was absolutely magnificent as the whisky-soaked, unshaven old reprobate who found the wreck.



In 1983 the film industry, after a few rather forgettable movies punctuated only by the little gem “*Smash Palace*”, tried a new genre - Maori history. The Maoris are NZ’s native race, and their unfortunate history parallels that of other ethnic groups who ran foul of expansion of the British Empire.

The Maoris were fierce warriors and forced the British to a treaty, but the results still finished up like most other countries. “*Utu*” (Revenge) deals with Te Wheke, a Maori scout for the British army who returns to his village to find the occupants, including his family, slaughtered by soldiers. He returns to his Maori heritage to take revenge, but things go wrong when he kills a white settler’s wife. The settler in turns seeks revenge against Te Wheke. It is a quite moving story and would be hard to deal with in a U.S. production, but the Kiwis carry it off superbly. The Film Board’s financial input was vital, but the sheer quality of *Utu* led to other Maori-oriented films in the future.

In 1985 NZ tried another genre – science fiction. Not the special-effects Star Wars type of SF, but the more thoughtful (and lower budget) British style. “*The Quiet Earth*” was a fully NZ production with rising local actor Bruno Lawrence in the lead role (he also appeared in *Utu*). A sci-



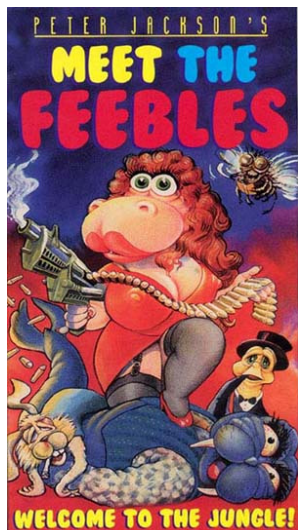
entific experiment linking all the worlds’ power grids has gone wrong and all the people have disappeared, presumably into a parallel universe. This movie has achieved cult status and was recently re-released on DVD. Twenty years later it is still a good movie.

The Kiwi film industry was now being noticed, and sometimes almost being taken seriously, but the next movie partly funded by the New Zealand Film Board was controversial. A friend brought it around one night and asked what we thought of it. Being a NZ movie, we expected more beautiful scenery, a good plot, and all the usual.

Peter Jackson’s *Bad Taste* was a real shocker. Kiwis just didn’t do chainsaw meets flesh-eating alien movies. It was hilarious – a bit amateurish, very low budget, rough in places, disgusting in others, full of bad jokes and takeoffs of British shows – it was brilliant. And not a foreigner in sight. Fortunately for Jackson, many viewers agreed that it was good and *Bad Taste* shot to cult status.



The Film Board must have congratulated themselves on picking a winner, but it could so easily have become just another bad horror movie. Jackson followed it up in 1990 with the classic “*Meet The Feebles*”, a puppet animal stage show takeoff in which the characters are drug dealers, porno movie makers, and sex fiends. The finale in which Heidi the Hippo, the lead singer, takes her revenge with a machine gun is graphic, disturbing, and pure Peter Jackson.



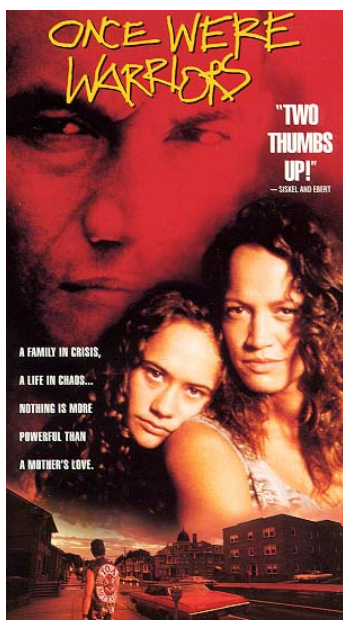
It also led to serious differences of opinion between Jackson and the Film Board.

NZ movies started to gain critical acceptance in a number of areas, and to receive wider attention overseas.

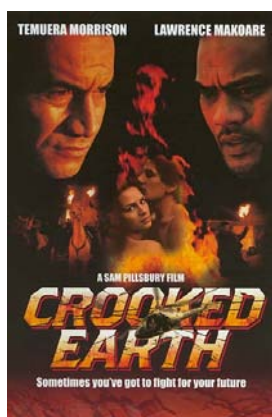
They began to fall into one of a number of groups – Maori, serious human drama, mainstream thriller, Peter Jackson, and Sheep.

Some examples are in order:

The Maoris have a rich heritage and some of the better NZ movies have developed on this, especially as it relates to the Maori people in modern times. The best example is the 1994 "Once Were Warriors", in which powerful character actor Temuera Morrison plays a Maori whose life is unraveling because he can't handle the pressures of a modern life in which he seems to have no part. He descends to drunkenness and wife beating, a sad contrast to the proud history of his people.

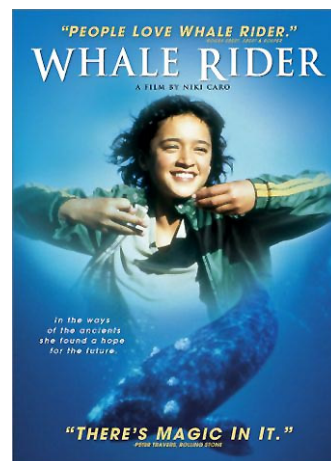


My personal favorite is Sam Pillsbury's 2001 production "Crooked Earth", an only slightly futuristic drama about ex-Army Captain Will Bastion who returns to his Maori tribe when his father dies, to take over leadership of the tribal group. His brother Kahu, a radical and militant troublemaker who is growing drugs to arm for "the revolution", feels he should be the leader because Bastion has been away too long and lost touch with his Maori



roots. Again, Temuera Morrison as Bastion plays a brilliant role. He balances the conflicts between tribal heritage and modern life in a strong, impressive performance. The script is perhaps not as good as it could be, but superior acting saves it. Could it be another prophetic film like Sleeping Dogs?

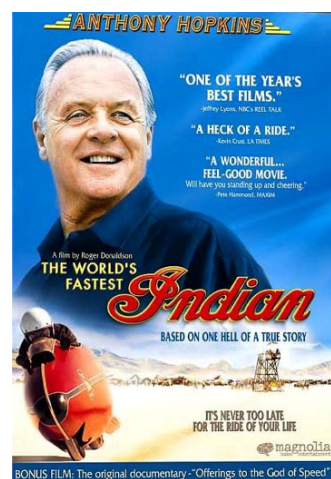
A more recent movie, "Whale Rider" from 2002, deals with the social problems faced in her Maori culture by a young girl who should inherit the leadership of her people, but this role has traditionally been reserved for males. Social problems are something the Kiwis are not afraid of, and their movies about the subjects are compassionate and constructive.

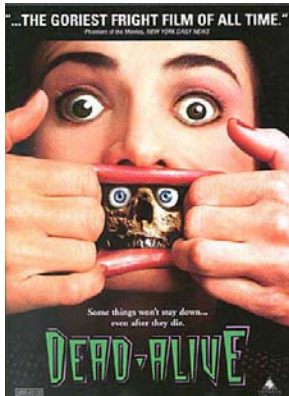


The serious human dramas of recent years go back to, of all people, Peter Jackson. His lovely but disturbing 1994 movie "Heavenly Creatures" is about a notorious NZ murder case. Two young girls have formed a close and sexual friendship, but when one girl's mother tries to separate them the girls decided that they must kill her.

Roger Donaldson's screenplay and direction of his 2005 masterpiece "The World's Fastest Indian" is the story of Burt Munro, a man who has a passion for achieving the world speed record for motorbikes at Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. For the lead character he made an inspired choice in Anthony Hopkins, partly because overseas funding was still often conditional on employing a big name star.

This was a two-edged sword, since it ensured overseas distribution but often led to inappropriate actors being cobbled into the movie.

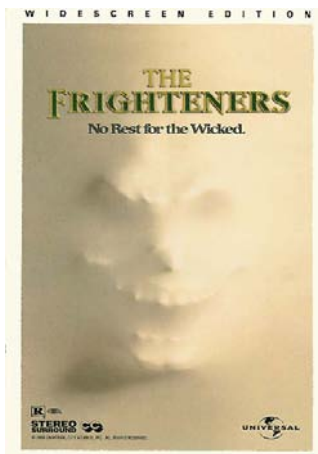




Peter Jackson's "*Brain Dead*" suffered from this when a popular Spanish leading lady was forced on him as a condition of funding from Spain. (In spite of this the movie is worth watching, especially for the zombie-meets-lawnmower sequence). It was released as *Dead-Alive* in the U.S.

In Anthony Hopkins' case, he provided a strong leading character in a movie which is really only about one man. It worked brilliantly and he carried the show to international commercial success.

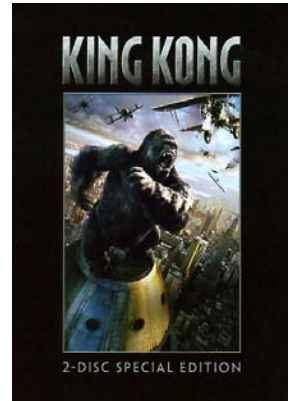
"*The Grasscutter*" from 1990 is classic well-done drama. An IRA informer ("grass") has been resettled in New Zealand, unknown to the local authorities. The IRA has tracked him down and a gunman has been sent out to deal with him. The director was Ian Mune, a Kiwi with a massive list of credits to his resume by now. As a result the movie, in spite of a low budget look, is gripping drama all through. It has a lot in common with Australia's *Mad Max* in that the budget did not allow for many studio special effects. If an apartment had to be blown up, they blew it up. In a high speed car chase through a major city, the cars simply drove VERY fast. The resulting movie has an authenticity that bigger budget effects seem to lack, and this effect is common to many NZ movies.



Two more mainstream movies are down to Jackson. "*The Frighteners*" from 1996 is a low key well crafted horror movie about a man who can see ghosts and talk to them, but he is hunted by an evil ghost who wants to kill him. He must enlist the help of the

other ghosts as people around him die, and he is blamed. Again, Jackson chose an overseas actor, Michael J Fox, for the leading role, and again they made it work. It certainly changed my opinion of Michael J Fox's acting abilities.

Jackson's passion for the classic movies led him to remake *King Kong* in 2005. Since it had already been remade some years earlier, this was a huge risk. It was big-budget and had a lot of overseas names, but once again good acting and direction paid off. Although not as commercially successful as it could have been, it is a worthy successor to the classic B&W movie.



We could not leave out one of the highest grossing series in movie history – Jackson's monumental production of the "*Lord of the Rings*" trilogy. The story does not need to be recounted here, but despite taking some small liberties with the story and taking over three years to do the three movies

properly, the result was a masterpiece of cinema. New Zealand's beautiful scenery came into its own, but the production was superb and the movies did full credit to Tolkien's stories. Once again many well known overseas actors were used, but in this case they complemented the movie rather than appeared as token draw card names.

There is always a small niche market for some special films, and the Kiwis have experimented there as well. *Footrot Flats* is a feature-length animated cartoon focusing on the life of a sheep dog on a NZ farm. It's quirky, funny, and a good laugh even for the kids.





Another good (but unintended) laugh is made-for-TV “*Xena: Warrior Princess*”. It’s historically inaccurate (Ninjas?), geographically challenged (Greece with NZ tree ferns?) and camp as a row of tents. It got even sillier when Hercules was thrown into the mix, and then thrown out again to his own spinoff show. The Xena series has recently been released on DVD.

Why? Probably just to prove that NZ can still do comedy, even by accident.

One unusual movie worth tracking down is the rather haunting action / adventure / fantasy *The Navigator – A Mediaeval Odyssey*. Made in 1988, this movie is about a group of men from the plague-ridden 14th century who dig a tunnel to the other side of the earth, seeking escape from the Black Death. They come up in 20th century New Zealand. It’s a strange movie, hard to classify, yet rather beautiful in its production and story.

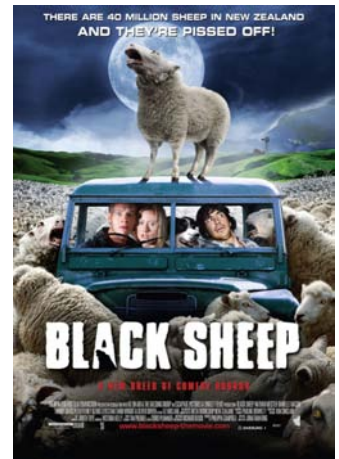


Which brings us to Sheep. Kiwis are the butt of many sheep jokes, mostly from Australians. One of the magic moments in *Bad Taste* was a shot of a stray bazooka round blowing up a sheep, so it was only appropriate that they should eventually do a zombie sheep horror movie. The 2006 “*Black Sheep*” is very much in the original style of Peter Jackson’s early movies, but Jonathan King’s writing and direction give a far more polished and tongue in cheek production. Genetic engineering goes horribly wrong due to human genes being introduced into the sheep (we won’t go into “how”). The sheep turn into zombie man-eaters, as they usually do.

The movie’s strong point is the special effects, supplied by NZ’s Weta Workshops. Weta was formed to work on *Lord of the Rings* and just kept going, providing NZ with one more world-class facility for their productions. We can only hope that the Kiwis don’t leave the Sheep genre there, but continue their good work.

New Zealand had a stroke of luck a few years ago when the Hollywood writers and production

crews went on an extended strike. Countries with inexpensive professional production staff, like Australia and New Zealand, were able to pick up the slack. The strike gave the NZ industry a boost it is still benefiting from. One down side is that their staff are now becoming used to a faster pace of production, and the higher wages that go with it. There is a concern that this may make the smaller productions uneconomic in the near future.



Let’s hope not. The world would be a poorer place without zombie sheep.

Availability

There is an excellent list of NZ movies at www.nzvideos.org. It lists many movies not included here.

This list contains some of the films still available on DVD. Most are available through www.amazon.com. Some have been re-released recently, and some of these are of indifferant quality. Some are subtitled – check the language before buying.

Non-Australian and NZ Buyers Note:

Some titles are only available as Region 4 DVDs. Check that your DVD player supports this region.

Bad Taste: Universal

Black Sheep: Fangoria / Genius Entertainment
Australian Release via Icon (DVD & Blu Ray)

Brain Dead (Released in the U.S. as **Dead Alive**) Universal

Crooked Earth: Magna Pacific

The Frighteners: Universal

Heavenly Creatures: Miramax

Meet The Feebles: Wingnut Films

The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey:
(Released in the U.S. as **The Navigator: An Odyssey Across Time**) : Arenafilm

Once Were Warriors: Magna Pacific

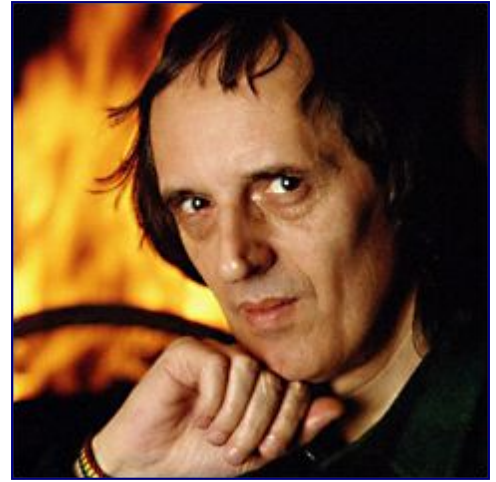
The Quiet Earth: Anchor Bay

Sleeping Dogs: Starz / Anchor Bay, released in a twin pack with **Smash Palace**

Utu: Magna Pacific

Dario Argento

Maestro of Giallo and Italian Horror Cinema



Dario Argento was born on September 7, 1940 in Rome to a home filled with cinema, fashion and art. His parents were renowned Italian producer Salvatore Argento and fashion model Elda Luxardo. Argento had a good childhood and always discusses his parents with a reverent tone. This is all the more surprising considering how many of his films are focused on childhood trauma and violence, perhaps it could be said that the close-knit nature of his family made him more aware of what others do not have. One could also argue that his tumultuous relationships with women later in life influenced much of his filmmaking.

His youth was marked by a love of folktales, myths and legends and he developed his writing skills by working on various film journals. He took a job as a columnist for an evening newspaper, Paese Sera as he believed this would be far more interesting than college. His occupation as a journalist opened the door to his early work as a screenwriter and collaborating with Sergio Leone on a number of Westerns in the late Sixties.

Argento's first film as director was the startling Giallo *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) which proved to be a major international hit. Its visual elegance coupled with a detective story marked by stylized violence took everyone by surprise.



This was followed by *The Cat O' Nine Tails* (1971) and *Four Flies on Black Velvet* (1971). It is interesting to note that *Four Flies on Black Velvet* will have its first DVD release in the US in 2009 !

Giallo was a major force in Italian cinema. The term came from the Italian word for yellow and

the genre developed from

cheap tawdry paperbacks with bright yellow covers. Giallo is a very unique form of crime and detective storytelling, usually including unusual twists and turns, eroticism (of all form), violence and sometimes horror. Giallo is also marked by strong stylized violence, fetishism and a "European" attitude to nudity and sex.

Giallo was primarily a product of the Sixties and Seventies but has continued with a recent revival of interest in the genre. In non European countries there was ongoing debate about the sex and violence in the films and until recently they were regularly censored.

Argento next explored some television work but since his major success was in Giallo he returned with *Deep Red* (1975). *Deep Red* is still considered one of the best Giallo films ever made. It has all the elements one would expect from such a film, detective work, brutal and indeed prolonged killings, a medium which brings in psychic and occult themes and a bizarre and twisted climax.



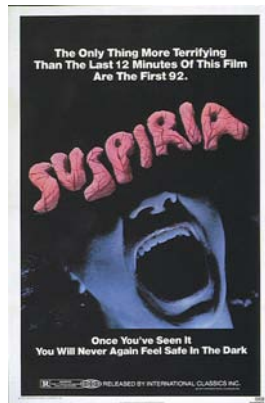
The soundtrack to *Deep Red* is also extremely impressive and the music score by Goblin (who worked in many Argento films) has become a classic. Argento's creative use of music added an extra dimension to his unique method of filming and stylized presentation of violence and in many ways this was refined into something truly spectacular in *Deep Red* and *Suspiria*.



A Childhood Trauma from Deep Red !

Deep Red was cut in many of its releases however an uncut edition is now available in Australia from Umbrella Entertainment. A completely restored edition (even down to Argento's original concept for the credits) has been released in 2008 from Another World Entertainment, Denmark.

Argento moved from Giallo to horror for his next film *Suspiria* (1977) which is a terrifying dreamlike exploration of the world of witchcraft. The sheer beauty of the colours, images and textures in the film, not to mention the brutality of its violence, have repeatedly seen it named as the best horror film of all time. *Suspiria* (which means whispers) is a film which must be experienced rather than watched in a purely logical manner. It is marked by an astounding musical score and an orgy of colour, texture and imagery. The story begins as Suzy Banyon arrives in Germany to attend the Tans Academy, everything from the rain to the way the academy



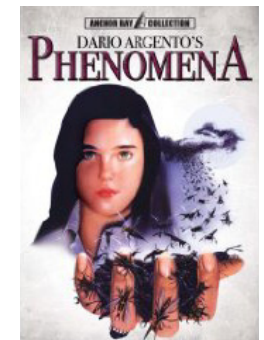
The Luscious colours of *Suspiria* created a tense but seductive world of terror and witchcraft.



is photographed produces a feeling of unease and edginess. The Academy itself is filled with strange and unusual characters, vindictive students and odd occurrences. Where do the teachers go each night ? After various gruesome murders Suzy comes to suspect that there is a coven at the heart of the Academy and that its leader is the Black Queen. She begins to explore its secrets but will she survive what she finds ?

Suspiria was meant to be the first of a trilogy, the second *Inferno* was made in 1980, the final film, *Mother of Tears* was not made until 2007 ! *Suspiria* was certainly the most masterful of the three, *Mother of Tears* is certainly an unusual experience and a visual feast but sadly does not compare to the first in the series.

In 1982 Argento returned to Giallo with the powerful and visceral *Tenebrae* (1982) and the fascinating *Phenomena* (1985). While these two films are now seen as classics they were not especially well received at the time, constant problems with censorship did not help. *Tenebrae* was a superb study of a psychopathic killer with some truly disturbing scenes of violence. Much of the violence was trimmed from *Tenebrae* on release in Australia and *Phenomena* was mutilated and released as *Creepers* in the US (and Australia). Argento then decided to focus on horror for a while and worked on *Demons 2* with Lamberto Bava in 1986 and a number of related projects.



In 1987 Argento decided to direct *Opera*, another Giallo. However, this time the film was hampered by constant setbacks including the withdrawal of Vanessa Redgrave to the death of his father. His 1993 Giallo *Trauma* was somewhat more successful.

One of the changes that came about in the Nineties was the rise of his daughter Asia Argento. She starred in *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996) and *Phantom of the Opera* (2001). *The Stendhal Syndrome* and *Phenomena* both illustrate a fascinating element to Argento's work. He spends a large amount of time carefully researching each film and regularly uses real life health conditions (such as the Stendhal Syndrome) to give an air of authenticity to his films.



The Stendhal Syndrome also brings attention to the savagery in a lot of his films, most of it directed at women. This certainly increased during his films since the late Eighties, in the *Stendhal Syndrome*, for example, the scenes of rape are especially harrowing. Argento has been regularly accused of being a misogynist filmmaker, his response to this is simply that his experience with relationships has been "difficult" and hence he explores these themes in his films. It is interesting that the same accusation is made against H.R. Giger (of *Aliens* fame) and his response is much the same.

Too often people confuse exploration of themes of violence, sexuality and trauma as an indication of the filmmakers mental state when we would not make such judgements about an author. A person who writes a book about serial killers is not necessarily a serial killer, so I do not believe we can make sweeping judgements about filmmakers and artists from a "Puritan" perspective. It is interesting that a large body of

The Stendhal Syndrome certainly illustrates Argento's increasing use of extreme violence, much of it sexualized.



psychiatric literature has been produced to argue that the exploration of themes of violence and sexuality in film are actually healthy for the filmmaker and the audience. It is much safer to explore the darkness of the psyche in fiction than in reality !

Certainly Argento's works are brutal, visceral and at times confronting, however, works of great cinema and art do not necessarily have to be comfortable and attempts at censorship can mean a loss for all of us if we allow them to occur.

Argento returned to Giallo with the *Card Player* (2001), *Sleepless* (2001) and *Do you like Hitchcock* (2005). Argento also produced two rather impressive episodes in the *Masters of Horror* Series.

He is working on a new edition of *Suspria* with a tentative release date of 2010 and also on a Giallo film called *Giallo*. *Giallo* tells the tale of a serial slasher with a lust for mutilating beautiful women. After discovering that her sister has been abducted by the notorious serial killer who operates under the name "Yellow," an American flight attendant asks for the assistance of an Italian investigator to locate and rescue her before it is too late.

Some recommended Argento DVD Collections:

Umbrella Entertainment (Australia)

Argento Classics Volume 1

Includes:

Deep Red, *Tenebrae* and *Phenomena*.



Argento Classics Volume 2

Includes:

The Bird with the Crystal Plumage, *Suspria* and *Phantom of the Opera*.



Anchor Bay (USA)

Argento Box Set

There are also some solid single and double DVD editions from Umbrella Entertainment (Australia), Anchor Bay (US) and Blue Underground (US).



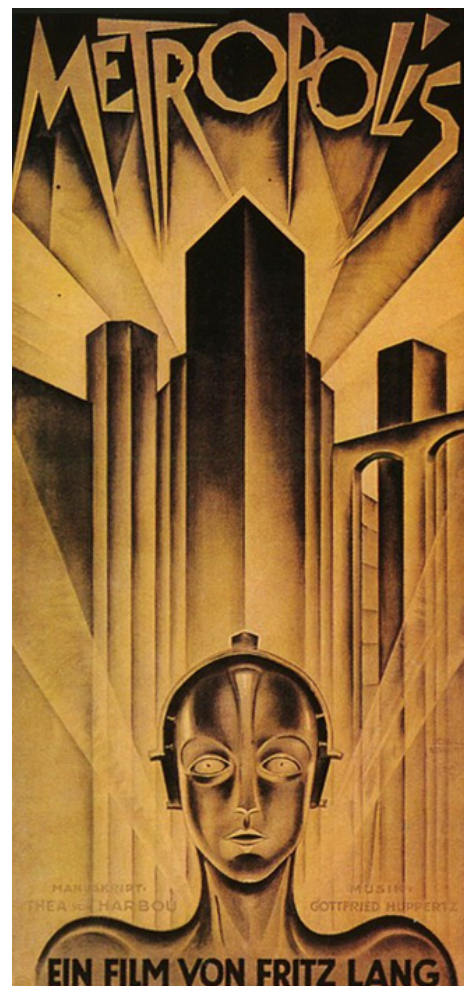
A Beginners Guide to the Classics of World Cinema

World Cinema offers a great diversity of genres, styles and themes. It covers everything from cult and extreme (such as Japanese Horror) to art films and what could be best considered “classic cinema”. In this article I want to examine “classic” world cinema and offer some suggestions for entry points into the field. It would be too easy to see “classic” world cinema as being too pretentious and “high brow” and write it off and to be honest, there are films which fall into this category. However, that being said, if you take the risk and explore some of the more “classic” world cinema titles you will be surprised at the depth of vision that they embody.

Many of these offer exemplary filmmaking – beautiful cinematography, superb character development and insightful and interesting plots and can offer you an experience which is far superior to the present consumer sludge which oozes from the American mainstream film industry on a regular basis.

One of the complaints so often heard about world cinema is about dubbing and sub titles. I will register my opinion here strongly against dubbing, I believe that even with the best dubbing, it takes away from the original intent of the film, at worst, it makes a mockery of the film altogether. It is incredibly culturally insensitive to have western accents laid over the original actors who put their all into a performance.

In the early dates of world cinema when televisions were of low resolution and many titles were on ninth generation video tapes with smudged white sub titles something could be said about the difficulty of reading them. However, in 2009 with high definition LCD televisions, high quality DVD and Blu Ray and a diverse range of sub title options in various col-



ours, they work well and even if it takes a little more investment in time and effort to enjoy the cinema offered, it is worth it.

The next question is where to begin ?

There are just so many films. One of the easier options are the various collections which have been produced for the Australian market by both Madman Entertainment and Umbrella Entertainment. These offer a solid selection of World Cinema for you to begin your journey.

A Beginner's Guide to Cinema 1 Madman Entertainment

This is a superb set exploring the range of classic cinema from around the world focusing on the 20th Century.

From the groundbreaking *Metropolis* (Germany 1927)



with its dark vision of the future to the comedic genius of Buster Keaton in *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (USA 1928).

There is *The Man with a Movie Camera* (USSR 1929) which is a rare montage of urban life in the USSR which not only pioneered early cinematic techniques but offered a very insightful documentary produced at a very early stage of cinema development.

We then move forward in time to the classic *Umberto D* (Italy 1952). It is considered the greatest Neo-Realist film of all time and depicts in a powerful and visceral way one man's primal battle for survival in the world of post war Rome as Umberto D tries to sustain his dignity and way of life in face of poverty.

This is followed by the truly classic *Seven Samurai* (Japan 1954), it is still considered one of the most significant films of all time and was one of the first films to break through World Cinema to the West. It is the tale of a small farming village whose villagers entreat a number of masterless Samurai to protect them from marauding brigands with mixed results.

The collection ends with the outrageous *Vivre Sa Vie* (France 1962) which is told in twelve episodes and epitomizes the radical new style as embodied in the French New Wave. It is a complex film using all manner of cinematic styles and is considered the best of Jean-Luc Godard's films.

A Beginner's Guide to Cinema 1 offers an excellent introduction to World Cinema, superbly presented in a box set with individual DVDs with lots of nice extras including insightful commentaries. The selection offers covers a wide spectrum of cinema in terms of time, style and content.

A Beginner's Guide to Cinema 2 Madman Entertainment 2008

Madman Entertainment has followed up the success of the first Beginner's Guide with a further set which really explores some of the different styles and themes of Classic world cinema.

The set opens with *The Blue Angel* (Weimar Germany 1930) starring Marlene Dietrich and then moves to the unique vision which is *Film Noir* with *Double Indemnity* (USA 1944).

We then move to the truly surreal vision of *Orpheus* by Jean Cocteau (France 1950) and the dark melancholy of *Tokyo Story* (Japan 1953).

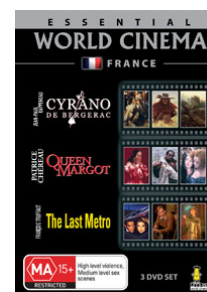
In *Imitation of Life* (USA 1959) we explore the world of melodrama in the most representative film by Douglas Sirk and then end the collection with the truly remarkable *The Leopard* (Italy 1963) which is a truly masterful work of cinema Burt Lancaster, Claudia Cardinale and Alain Delon.



Both of these collections offer excellent value and an excellent way to explore the diversity of world cinema.

World Cinema is also marked by its cultural diversity and another way to explore the various styles and themes is by examining the cinema of each country or region.

Umbrella Entertainment has released a series of titles called "Essential World Cinema" which explore key titles by region including Italy, France, Germany, Scandinavia and United Kingdom. Many more are on the way and many have multiple sets.



The "Essential World Cinema: France" series, for example, has three sets thus far the first including the classic *Queen Margot*, *Cyrano De Bergerac* and *The Last Metro*.



The second includes *Children of Paradise*, which is considered France's answer to *Gone with the Wind*, *Jean De Florette* and *The Music Teacher*.

The latest series released includes *Bande à part*, *Wages of Fear* and *La Règle du Jeu*.



The Essential World Cinema: Scandinavia collection is especially intriguing including some unusual cinema from Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

These are recent World Cinema releases and represent the “cutting edge” of European filmmaking.



Insomnia (1997) is a brilliant thriller starring Stellan Skarsgård that was famously remade by Hollywood in 2002 with Al Pacino in the lead. Erik Skjoldbjærg's debut feature is an impressive mixture of psychological thriller, suspense tale, morality play and police procedural drama.

You either love or hate Lars Von Trier and *Breaking the Waves* (1996) is the first of his Golden Heart trilogy exploring loss, love and redemption. His unique film style is challenging and this is a fascinating experience.

My Life As a Dog (1988) was nominated for two Academy Awards and is a very quirky coming-of-age cult classic from acclaimed Swedish director Lasse Hallström (*The Cider House Rules*). It tells the story of Ingemar, a motherless 12-year-old boy forced to adapt to life in his aunt and uncle's village.

Umbrella has also released the superb 7 DVD set "Scorsese: My Voyage through Italian Cinema", it includes the truly definitive documentary on Italian cinema - *My Voyage to Italy* and a range of classic titles (see our review later in this issue).



If you wish to follow up specific directors as part of your World Cinema journey, both Madman have nice collections. Madman has a wide range of titles in its "Director's Suite" Series.



In 2008 Madman been releasing an incredible range of titles by the German filmmaker Fassbinder.

These have been released in thematic collections. For example, Fassbinder on Sex combines three of Fassbinder's most outrageous and yet thought provoking works, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, *Fox and his Friends* and *In a Year with 13 Moons*, which offer the maverick filmmaker's unique views about sex and the nature of sexuality.



The Bitter Tear of Petra von Kant explores the power of the feminine and the power it has over men. *Fox and his friends* is still considered a controversial work exploring homosexual relationships and sex, while *In a Year with 13 Moons* is a homage to Fassbinder's former lover, Armin Meier, and it follows two days in the life of Elvira, a transsexual who had a sex change to win the love of an oblivious colleague.

Umbrella also has various sets focused on individual directors including the Fellini Collection, the Werner Herzog Collection, Herzog Kinski Collection, Lars Von Trier Collection and so on. Hopefully this article will have given you some ideas of where to start your journey into classic World Cinema.

For further information visit:

Madman Entertainment
Web: <http://www.madman.com.au>

Umbrella Entertainment
Web: <http://www.umbrellaent.com.au>

The Independent Cinema of Eric Stanze



Eric Stanze is the owner of independent production company Wicked Pixel Cinema, who specialize in horror / splatter films. He has worked in a number of film jobs over the years from makeup to

writing to acting, and his range of experience is showing out well in his more recent films. We will look at some of these films over the years and follow Eric's increasing importance in the genre.

Savage Harvest was his first film. The plot is brief but competent. Hundreds of years ago a Cherokee tribe settled in a patch of land. A tribal elder inadvertently summoned demons to the land, and all the tribe died. Their only legacy is small pieces of rock with crude drawings of the demons on them.



The legend says that the demons can enter our world through the person of anyone who touches one of these pieces of rock. This can only be triggered by the arrival on the land of the direct lineal descendant of the Indian elder, and can only be stopped by the death of that descendant. The bloodbath that ensues among a group of teenage campers (one of them is, naturally, the descendant) is as savage as any film of this genre that I have seen.

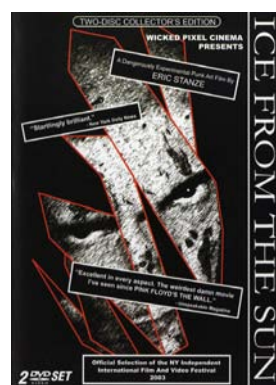
Stanze shot the film on SVHS video and from there it was transferred to DVD. The filming looks rather low budget as a result, but the action and makeup more than overcome this. The use of outdoor locations also makes up for the small number of effects and takes some of the low-budget look off the film. It's a remarkably good film for a first attempt – competently acted, well produced by DJ Vivona and Stanze from a story by Stanze, and good makeup work by

By Bob Estreich

Tony Bridges. The collector's edition I reviewed also contained commentary tracks, behind the scenes footage and stills.

Considering how basic their equipment was, and that the actors and actresses were unknowns, I am surprised at the level of skill shown by all concerned.

Ice From The Sun was a disappointment, and I thought Stanze lost the plot on this one. A being called The Presence dominates a dimension between Heaven and Hell, and sucks in mortals to die horrible deaths. The Presence had an apprentice and he has taken over from his master. He is more cruel than his master ever was, and the angels and devils have decided that he must be killed. A human, Alison, has just committed suicide and she is to be placed in the Dimension to do the job.



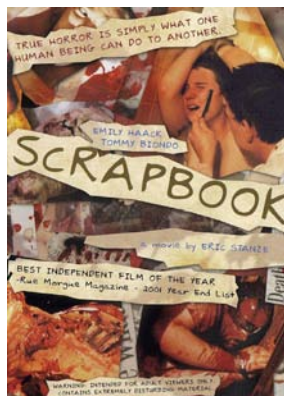
One by one we see the latest batch of victims cruelly slaughtered, usually by a method that is hidden in their deepest fears. One victim, deeply afraid of suffocation, is killed by an injection of a drug that makes his tongue swell. He suffocates, but in such a dreadful way that even he hadn't envisaged it. Can they distract The Presence long enough for Alison to work out how to kill it? So far so good.

Eric Stanze wrote, directed and edited the film. He seems to have been overpowered with the effects now available to him. Photography is jerky, out of focus, and keeps jumping from black and white to distorted colour. It is distracting and annoying, and is accompanied by an excessively heavy sound track that does little



for the film. Brian McClelland, one of the sound track writers, is capable of far better as his work in *Savage Harvest* showed. Some familiar actors appear again from *Savage Harvest*, Ramona Midgett and Tommy Biondo. They do their best, but the movie is simply overproduced and their work is overshadowed by the unnecessary effects.

Scrapbook made up for the defects of *Ice From The Sun*. It is a chilling psychological horror film about a girl who is kidnapped and brutalized by her captor, Leonard.



He keeps a scrapbook of photos of the atrocities he has committed on each girl he has kidnapped and killed, and expects the girls to add their own comments. The scrapbook is the story of his life and the girls' inevitable deaths. Clara must put up with the brutalization until she can make some sort of contact with Leonard through her writings in his scrapbook.

The warning on the DVD "Contains extremely disturbing material" should not be taken lightly. The review copy was unclassified and appeared to have no distributor, and for good reason. Rape, amputation, sexual assault, murder and extreme violence are all part of the film.

While generally they are useful to the plot, they tip the picture from "very violent" into "pornographic". If you can handle this, though, you get a well-crafted horror/ suspense film which is absolutely excellent for its low budget.



Scrapbook is controversial and confront- ing yet highly effective cinema.

Once again, Tommy Biondo appears, and Emily Haack gives a brilliant performance as the tormented Clara.

Extras include the usual behind-the-scenes, deleted scenes, and commentary. Stanze is fond of these and I must admit they fill out the detail and give a better understanding of where all the violence fits in to his visualization of the film.

Savage Harvest 2 is unusual for an independent. Mostly the producers just move on to their next project. This sequel is set about ten years after the initial massacre. Ashley Lomack (Emily Haack just gets better with each film) lost her sister in the bloodbath. Unfortunately her sister crossed into neighboring land and the demons have now infected that farm as well.



Only one local, Zac (Eric Stanze), has studied the history and the legend and is somewhat aware of what is going on. Even he is not ready for the violence that ensues. So many of his friends have touched the engraved stones that the demons are able to possess them all one by one.

The film is a little reminiscent of Quentin Taran- tino's "**Dusk Til Dawn**", released about ten years earlier. It starts as a good gripping sus- pense plot that suddenly turns unreal and vi- cious as the demons come out to play.

Stanze surrendered production to Christ and Propst, keeping the role of executive producer and playing the part of Zac.



Savage Harvest II is visceral and gripping..

He also took a part in the editing and his increasing experience shows through.

The film is tightly constructed, the gore does not get in the way of the plot, and the acting is first class (including Stanze himself).

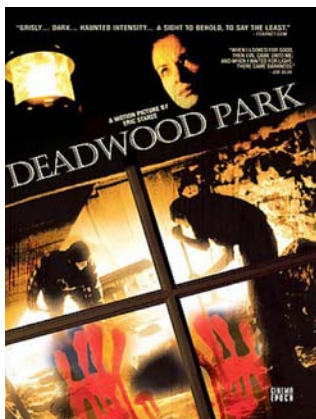
Jason Christ's cinematography is top-notch despite constant breakdown problems with the old equipment.

Deadwood Park follows in the same style. Eidolon Crossing was once the home of Dogwood Park, a thriving amusement park. Children started disappearing, and their bodies then turned up horribly mutilated. The park closed, the town's economy suffered, and it declined to almost a ghost town.

The derelict park became known as Deadwood Park. Jake's twin brother Francis was one of the last to disappear. Twenty five years later Jake has returned to town to sort out his personal problems.

Now, in the old rundown family house, the ghosts of the murdered children are trying to contact him, using the strong bond he had with his brother.

They lead him back to the old amusement park and its gruesome secret.



Deadwood is accomplished and combines a suspense story with a melancholic horror tale...

As Jake unwillingly delves further into the history of the killings, he uncovers some dark secrets from the past that may have been better left alone. The film shifts from a suspense thriller to a full-on horror story. Wallace builds up the tension slowly, concentrating more on the story of the murdered kids before the action really gets started.

Much of the film is centred in an abandoned fun park, and the skilful shots of the derelict, overgrown rides and roller coaster add a certain sadness to the developing suspense.

Stanze also did the editing, and once more the results are tight and professional. The effects are fairly minimal (the micro budget again) and mostly confined to the ghostly children in the early part of the film.

Somehow in this film "less is more" and the atmosphere is maintained without stopping for a splatterfest too often. I think this quality is something that separates the enthusiastic amateur film maker from the true professional – knowing when to concentrate on the film instead of the gore. The quality feel of the film is well enhanced by Mario Viele's beautiful musical score.

This is just a brief look at some of Stanze's films, showing his increasing talent. Stanze has twenty films to his credit so far, with a new one, **Ratline**, due out this year. Some of his films have won awards in independent film festivals. There is a maturity to his work, with splatter well balanced with good writing, believable plots, and quality technical workmanship. In so many ways, his career seems to be similar to that of Peter Jackson, but more hemmed in by a lack of commercial success.

He seems to be on the verge of becoming a truly good mainstream filmmaker. The biggest restriction to his talent is the old problem of funding. I think he has reached the point where someone should give him some money and a good script, and let him go to it.

SAVAGE HARVEST (1994) Wicked Pixel / Image Entertainment

ICE FROM THE SUN (1999) Wicked Pixel / Image Entertainment

SCRAPBOOK (2000) Wicked Pixel

SAVAGE HARVEST 2 : OCTOBER BLOOD (2006) Wicked Pixel / Elite Entertainment

DEADWOOD PARK (2007) Cinema Epoch / Koch Entertainment

BOOKS IN REVIEW



**Biggles'
Dangerous Mission
Biggles'
Big Adventures
Capt W E Johns
Allen & Unwin 2008**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



Biggles is back ! Who? Squadron Leader James Bigglesworth, British flying ace and hero to many boys after World War 1. Biggles was the lead character in a huge series of 100 books published from 1932, based on Captain Johns' wartime experiences. Biggles became a legend in British literature, and received passing mention as "Cardinal Biggles" of the Spanish Inquisition in Monty Python, one of Rimmer's books in Red Dwarf, a Terry Pratchett novel Good Omens, and a more subtle mention as Captain Jack in Doctor Who. There was even an unsuccessful Australian radio series ("The Air Adventures of BIGGLES ! ") plus a video game and a movie. His career spanned World War 1, 2 and even the Cold War years, helping him live up to his reputation as "the British Empire's Most Fearless Pilot Adventurer". Johns' last book, Biggles Does Some Homework, was partly written when he died in 1997. The 100th book was a collection of unpublished stories.

What was Biggles' appeal? Originally it was the level of detail that Johns could include in his books. He was fascinated by the aircraft (he was a bomber pilot himself) and their construction and performance, and he imparted this enthusiasm in his tales of aerial combat.

The plots were complex enough to hold the interest, the action fast enough to keep you reading. Character development was minimal, though, and this was later used as a negative leading to Biggles books being withdrawn from libraries. Even the baddie, Erich von Stalhein, was rather two-dimensional. He kept turning up in the books, though, and his appearance was eagerly awaited by readers to see what new

mischief he was up to. The various books covered most of the British Empire when it really was an Empire, so there was even a bit of geography and colonial history to learn from them.

The two books listed in the title are a fairly representative sample of the post-WW1 stories. Surprisingly I still enjoyed each one of them. They now seem a bit outdated, especially in the aircraft descriptions, and the storylines are a little quaint, but they hold up remarkably well. They represent an excellent example of boy's fiction of the time. Try your young sons on them and see if they can get into them. I suspect they will, in spite of the lack of computers and jet engines, because the detailed descriptions allow the reader to use his imagination. I suspect also that they will appeal to the older fathers who will remember Biggles fondly. You may be surprised at just how well written the books were, in spite of literary considerations.

I learned to enjoy reading with Biggles books. They were challenging enough for an eight year old to come to grips with. There were new words to look up. The plots held my attention. The books widened my vocabulary, taught me correct spelling and grammar, and stimulated my imagination. It was something of a shock to hear some decades ago that a group of librarians had decided to take Biggles off their shelves because the books had "no literary merit", whatever that was. This strange decision was based on the lack of character development, simplistic plots, colonial attitudes, and violence. These were the very things that kept me reading the books! Book number 29, "Biggles Fails To Return", may have been prophetic. I wonder if these librarians ever looked for character development in the Bible?

The stories are an interesting reflection of the great colonial age of the British Empire. The natives are either loyal followers or untrustworthy savages, or are simply ignored. It's not patronizing, that's just the way it was. The frontier colonies like the Yukon in Canada are still shown as a later-day version of the Wild West.

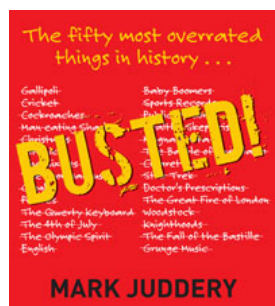
The aircraft is the way of the future for the Empire to keep in contact despite the enormous distances.

British colonial outposts are still pictured as vaguely uncivilized, with the British providing the only culture. There are a lot of historical attitudes hidden in these books. In the last decade or so kids have been fed a load of pre-digested, pre-visualized entertainment in videos and DVDs and TV shows, and the skill of imagining something in your own mind seems to have been lost. Strangely enough, last year librarians were praising the Harry Potter books for encouraging children to take up reading again. That's exactly what the Biggles books were about – encouraging kids to entertain themselves by reading. Like Harry Potter, I think there are more than a few adults out there who will enjoy reading Biggles as well. Go on, try it.

Maybe there should be one more book in the series– “Biggles Makes a Comeback”.

Busted !
The 50 most overrated
things in
history exposed
Mark Juddery
Random House 2008

A hilarious, myth-busting romp through history



Mark Juddery is a writer and journalist whose features appear in The Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian and everything in between, including a popular weekly column in The Canberra Times. He has an acerbic tongue, a vicious turn of phrase and a great sense of wit. He also has some mean research behind his work.

In Busted ! He examines the fifty most overrated things in history. This is not just an excuse for personal diatribes or hysterical attacks, each item is meticulously researched and his criticism backed with cold, hard facts. This is skepticism at its most informative and wickedly entertaining.

From the non existence of the Brontosaurus to the success of the Titanic. From Gallipoli as the foundation of Australian culture to Google, from Pirates to the Wall Street Crash, this is one eye opening book !

Contagious
Scott Sigler
Hodder & Stoughton
2009
Hachette (Australia)

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

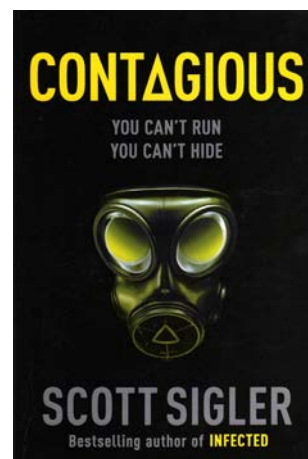
This novel is Sigler's follow-up to his successful *Infected*, reviewed earlier in this magazine.

To recap the story, a tiny satellite from ... somewhere ... is orbiting the earth. It is launching canisters of spores tailored to take over human minds and bodies as hosts. When they hatch, the small octopoid hatchlings will build a “gateway” through which an invading force can arrive on earth. They live off their hosts' bodies while doing this.

Only one man, Perry Dawsey, a redneck ex-football star, has so far survived the spores. He carved out the infections from his body before they completed their job, and although he is physically and psychologically scarred he is the Government's only weapon against the invaders. The spores had partly developed inside him, and he can now hear their thoughts and the instructions the satellite is broadcasting to them. Thus he can locate their nests and “help” the hosts – by slaughtering them.

The Government team needs his help to locate new gateways, but first they must earn his respect. They must get him to follow orders and help the Army locate the nests and destroy them before a gateway is completed. If an infected host can be taken alive, their laboratory may be able to come up with a cure - if they can stop Dawsey from killing the victims first.

The satellite is aware of Dawsey and it must deal with him, too. It has a limited ability to re-design its spores, and it uses this in one of its final attempts to build a new spore that is contagious and windborne. It also uses one of its hosts to make contact with Dawsey and try to bring him under control. Dawsey will not be an easy conquest for either side. He well remembers the incredible pain of being taken over by the spores.



He genuinely believes the best way he can help infected people is by killing them to save them that sort of pain.

This time the hosts are better organized. They take over the Army unit sent to destroy them and use it for their defence. With one of the hosts controlling the rest, the satellite can concentrate on blocking Dawsey's reception.

With Dawsey partly neutralized, the Army detachment missing, and the hosts moving into a bigger city where they can spread the disease faster, there is going to be huge loss of life before one side prevails.

Once again Sigler tells the story from the point of view of each of the protagonists, including the satellite. You couldn't say that a satellite has a personality, but Sigler manages to almost give it one – purpose-driven, calculating, and completely devoid of emotion as it goes about its work. It is the non-human touch that singles this book out – there is a tremendous sense of menace in fighting a war against an opponent driven by a program, one that is so small you can't find it and whose side effects are so lethal and fast that medical scientists can't even study it before the victim dies and dissolves.

Scott Sigler has a number of books to his credit. His earlier ones were in podcast format, which encouraged many people to look at his work. Alternate publishing methods still do not reach a big audience, so it is good to see that he is now being published in conventional media. This will expose his work to a bigger audience.

As a sign that his work has achieved success, movie rights have been sold to Rogue Pictures, and a brief teaser clip is available on YouTube

<http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=gQpM4apJNPQ>

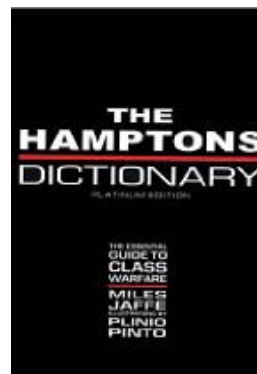
If you find you like the sound of the book, but missed *Infectious*, it can be downloaded in chapters from Sigler's website which also includes all manner of freebies, podcasts, downloads, videos of his media appearances and a lot more.

It is quite a superb author website and offers a great taste of his work.

Scott Sigler

<http://www.scottsigler.com>

Hamptons Dictionary
Miles Gaffe
Disinformation 2008
Tower Books
Australia



The Hamptons Dictionary is a viciously funny and satirical work which developed out of the website *Nuke the Hamptons* created by Miles Gaffe. Miles is the son of renowned architect Norman Jaffe and lives in the heart of the Hamptons, after years of experiencing the cultural invasion of the ubër-rich he decided to document the "class warfare" that was occurring in the Hamptons Dictionary.

The Hamptons Dictionary reminds me a little of the "Devils Dictionary" but is focused on the rich and famous who decimate the local culture each summer. While it may be focused on the experience of one community within a specific geographic location, its insightful and amusing critique of the insensitivity of the rich can be enjoyed by all....except perhaps by those to which the humour is directed !

You have to have a good sense of humour to enjoy this book, one company which didn't was *Jitney* - a coach company that provides transportation between Manhattan and the Hamptons which was horrified to find that their modes of transport were defined as "cattle cars" and a "bus for cidiots" – cidiots being a class warfare term for idiots from the city.

They distributed the book to their customers as a PR venture until they read the entry about their own company !

Every definition in the Hamptons is highly entertaining and wickedly incisive, such as "The Hamptons Serenade" *v.* The noise from electric noise trimmers, lawn mowers and leaf blowers that can be louder than a million crickets matching to town ! "Destitute" *n.* Having a net worth less than one million dollars. I especially like the term a "sprick" for a spoiled, rich kid

The Hamptons Dictionary is well illustrated and published in hardback.

Nuke the Hamptons

Web: <http://nukethehamptons.com>

**Horror Cinema
Taschen Books
Tower Books
(Australia)**

Horror Cinema from Taschen is one of the more insightful overviews covering the horror genre in the contemporary market. It is both aesthetically pleasing, packed with colour plates and full page images, and intellectually stimulating offering insight into the various genres of horror as well as covering the underlying psychological impulses which make horror cinema so popular.

The authors are all well respected including Paul Duncan who has edited some forty film books for Taschen, and authored the well received Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick volumes in the Film Series. Jonathan Penner who has written for movies, television, magazines and has worked extensively as an actor, screenwriter, and producer. His film credits include the cult classic *The Last Supper*, the Hamlet-inspired *Let the Devil Wear Black* and the short film for which he was Oscar-nominated, *Down on the Waterfront* and Steven Jay Schneider who received his MA in Philosophy from Birkbeck College, University of London, and is a Ph.D candidate in Cinema Studies at New York University. He is the author or editor of numerous books on film. This combination of different styles and authors who have a different view of cinema, from actors to academics



and general writers, produces a superb text which looks at horror cinema from many different, and at times, unique perspectives.

The chapters in *Horror Cinema* reflect the various themes within the genre: Slashers & Serial Killers; Cannibals, Freaks & Hillbillies; Revenge of Nature & Environmental Horror; Sci-fi Horror; The Living Dead; Ghosts & Haunted Houses; Possession, Demons & Evil Tricksters; Voodoo, Cults & Satanists; Vampires & Werewolves; and The Monstrous-Feminine. Many of these, however, are outside what we may first consider the mainstream horror genre. For example, serial killers cross over into crime cinema (and are also found in other genres such as detective cinema even Film Noir), yet here we come to appreciate how their unique characteristics fit within the horror genre. We also come to appreciate how the serial killer and by default the slasher genre, works in psychological and cinematic terms. As the viewer we identify with both the victim and the perpetrator. As the victim, we are pleased we are not the victim (thank god it is my neighbour and not me !). While on a darker and more primal level, we admire the skill even madness of the killer, though we would never admit it, especially to ourselves.

Horror Cinema explores the archetypal images which make up the horror genre and offers some very intriguing insights. For example, in the *Revenge of Nature & Environmental Horror* we come to appreciate the various forms nature takes in horror cinema from the pure revenge of nature, to nature as a motif for man's sexual nature (Hitchcock's *Birds*). From the clash of the primitive and modern (King Kong) to mad scientists and the fear of modifying nature ranging from *Godzilla* to the *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

Horror Cinema is profusely illustrated throughout



This superbly presented book covers horror as a worldwide phenomenon and shows an excellent understanding of the development of horror outside the mainstream (including references to key Australian exploitation horror titles) as well within world cinema.

The sheer number of films discussed is impressive, including in depth coverage of such classics as *Psycho*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Alien*, *The Exorcist*, *Dracula*, and *The Wicker Man*.

Jake's Wake
John Skipp and
Cody Goodfellow
Dorchester
Publishing 2008

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Jake Connaway is a thoroughly sadistic and evil man. Although he makes his living as a televangelist (something at which he is quite successful) in private he uses his charisma to dominate then degrade members of his flock. The women especially suffer, for Jake has a sexual magnetism that keeps them coming back for more even as they see themselves going downhill.

Jake is quite at ease with his dual personality. "...this was the message the blackness brought him: that he was born to lead, to carry that dark torch, put an end to the false light forever and ever. That he had been right about this all along, and that Christ had always been wrong".

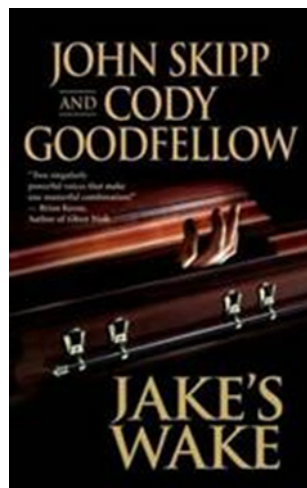
Then Jake is stabbed to death, caught with his pants down by the boyfriend of a girl he is currently working on. Free of his overpowering charisma, his victims can now see what they have become.

Although some women still harbour a certain fondness for him based on their sexual memories, most are happy to see him gone. Now they must sort out the mess that their lives have become, and the financial ruin of the families and the church that Jake established. Some victims gather at Jake's house, where they start to learn from each other something about how this vile man manipulated each of them.

Then Jake returns from the dead. His embalmed corpse climbs out of its coffin, slaughters the funeral people, and comes home.

"Jake was dead for three days. Then he got up. It was not a miracle, but a mockery of the resurrection, and a desecration of the body that had been so powerful a messenger for God's word, in life."

In death Jake is even more powerful. Now he is immortal he does not need to restrain himself, and the spree of depraved cruelty and torture



that follows is far worse than anything Jake did in his life. Although his victims were originally attracted to him because he rekindled their belief in God, now that belief is being tested to the maximum. How many will be found inadequate? Is there any power in Heaven or Hell that can stop Jake's vicious rampage?

For what should be technically called a splatter zombie story, this is the best suspense book I have read for quite a while. It holds you right to the surprising ending, at which point you feel glad it's over. The descriptions of Jake's bloody rampage are vivid and frightening, but appropriate to the story. It's definitely not a book for the easily upset.

Natural Harvest:
A Collection of Semen-Based Recipes
Web: <http://cookingwithcum.com/>

This has got to be one of the most unusual cookbooks I have seen. It offers a selection of semen based recipes. Yes, you have read it right, semen based recipes. Natural Harvest - A Collection of Semen-Based Recipes explores the culinary value of semen through beautiful photographs and delectable recipes.

The recipes range from exotic drinks such as cum based "Almost White Russian" through to Appetizers (Man Made Oysters sound appealing ?) to main courses including meat dishes and even a version of Lumpia for Filipino readers.

Of course, there are truly exotic sauces and desserts.

Natural Harvest - A Collection of Semen-Based Recipes is by Fotie Photenhauer and is nicely illustrated with scrumptious photographs of the various meals and is a very professional looking cookbook.

The question is will you dare try these recipes on your friends and if you do, would you admit what the secret ingredient is ?



**Sacred Terror
Religion and Horror on
the Silver Screen
Douglas E. Cowan
Baylor University Press
2008**



From the first time I saw “Hellraiser” I became intrigued by the interaction between religion and horror.

While it can be seen overtly in such films as *The Exorcist* or *Stigmata* to name just a couple, we also find religious themes and images throughout the vast majority of horror films, the question of course is why?

I have been surprised there has not been more books exploring this question – indeed *Sacred Terror* is one of the first on the subject.

Cowan explores religion and horror in cinema in an erudite and provocative manner. He argues that regardless of whether religious beliefs are empirically real, the various questions that are explored within religion are also explored within horror cinema, it could be said they “speak the same language” and that there is an intersection between the imagery and iconography in common use.

Cowan argues that horror films are excellent vehicles for externalizing the fears that lie inside our selves: of evil; of sex; of desire; of places we perceive are being imbued with meaning; of a change in the order of the world; of death, of dying badly; of fanaticism; and of the power-and the powerlessness-of religion.

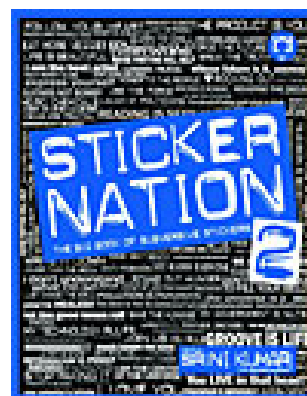
Cowan explores religion and horror from a thorough grounding in the academic study of religion as well as a solid understanding of horror cinema. Of course, ultimately, there are various ways to interpret the religious themes of horror.

Cowan also explores various academic theories regarding the nature of religion and the concept of the holy and its relationship to horror and terror. It is intriguing that throughout the history of religion there has always been a place for the scary story (whether it be the myths of the Old Testament or the wild tales of the Hindu Puranas) and so many of these themes now seem to have found their way into horror cinema.

While some may see that certain impulses, banished by science and rationalism, resurface in horror films—an approach especially popular with students of Carl Jung. Others see cinema as the “new post modern religion”, a way to explore the search for meaning in a secular, post modern world where religious myths and legends have lost their potency and significance and are now relegated to the world of superstition.

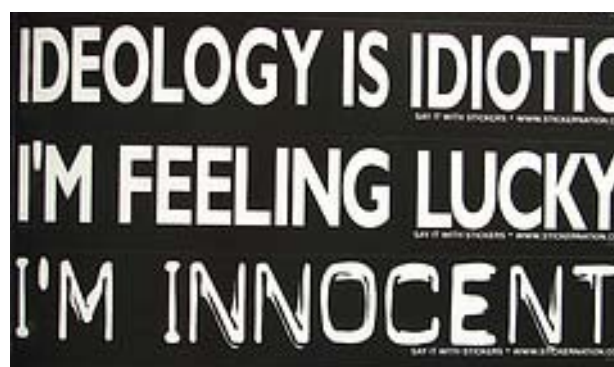
However you wish to view it, *Sacred Terror* offers some fascinating insights into the intersection between horror and religion. However, the general reader should be aware that this text is based within the world of “academic discourse” and may prove heavy going for those without a background in religious studies.

**Sticker Nation 2
Srini Kumar
Disinformation 2008
Tower Books
Australia**



One of the ways that the disenfranchised like to communicate is via T-Shirts, buttons, posters and above all stickers. Stickers seem to be such an easy way to put across ideas into bite sized packages that confront, dazzle, offend and stimulate debate. Stickers create a way to put a message across that isn’t controlled by mass media or censored by the mainstream.

Srini Kumar has made a name for himself worldwide as one of the most popular sticker artists. He began in 1994 in a simple quick print store and now his stickers have achieved legendary status at Unamerican.com and StickerNation.com.





At the same time stickers are not cheap and to be able to buy a whole book of them at a good price is pretty damn awesome.

Sticker Nation 1 was a rave success and this follow up volume is just as superb, it is filled to the brim with all manner of stickers.

Some of my favourites include "I refuse to be a Victim", "Nobody Owns You" and "Mix Business with Pleasure".

The vast majority of the stickers in the book are single-line slogans, arranged eight to a page. There is also a selection of two line slogans and a separate section at the end has larger slogans on smaller button sized stickers (with explanations).

Sticker Nation includes a great introduction and a section on how to use Stickers (which Kumar sees as radical poetry) to communicate your message. There is also information on how to purchase custom vinyl stickers from his website with your own message.

On a practical level, the stickers are well made, easy to remove and stick well.

This is a very fun way to express all manner of strange ideas from inspiration to protest, geek speak to philosophy, politics to just plain rebellion !

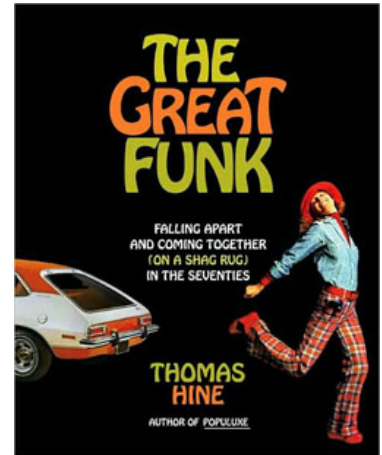
It is economical, entertaining and very cool. Get sticking !

**The Great Funk:
Falling Apart and Coming Together
(On a Shag Rug) in the Seventies
Thomas Hine
Sarah Crichton Books 2007**

Hine was the author of the ever popular volume Populuxe which covered the changes which took place between 1954-'64.

Hine believes that while the Sixties were seen

as the age of great tumultuous social change, it was in the Seventies that the significant changes were actually implemented which have created the present world as we know it.



While this book certainly explores the weirdness and eccentricity of the Seventies from polyester leisure suits to streaking, pet rocks to flairs, it also takes seriously the changes that were taking place on the social front. The development of women's liberation and gay rights, radical spirituality and the embracing of diversity and multiculturalism.

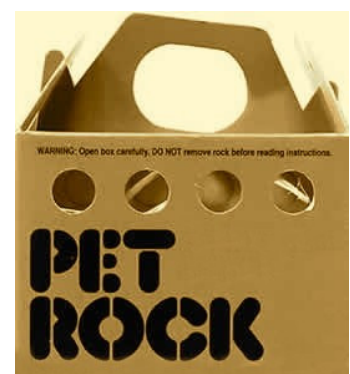
The Great Funk is a strange mixture of eccentric encyclopaedia and social criticism, on one hand it covers a bewildering array of Seventies strangeness in many cases fairly superficially.

On the other Hine tries to connect the various trends and experiences in a coherent and intelligent way to write a true history of what he sees as a maligned decade. For example he relates the evolution of "shag pile" carpet to the ability of people to "sit, sprawl or snuggle" on the floor and do away with the formality of traditional lounge design.

One reviewer said that this volume was more evocative than analytical and I think that is a fair evaluation, Hine is the man House & Garden has called "America's sharpest design critic" and hence this book reflects his personal vision of the Seventies rather than an academic treatise.

He brings together a diverse range of subjects in a beautifully presented volume filled with nostalgia but also interesting reflections on their significance.

The best way to describe The Great Funk is an informed coffee table book !



CINEMA REVIEWS



37 West
Cinephreak pictures
106 minutes
Written, edited, directed by Jakob Bilinski
Produced by Jakob Bilinski and Isaac Edwards
R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Jakob Bilinski is a prolific independent producer. This film dates back to his college days in 2002 – 2003. Shooting took 2 ½ weeks, but editing took the best part of a year as time and resources allowed. The results were worth it, though – some of his other low budget films could have done with a little more time on the editing, but this is slick and very professional looking.

As Bilinski's budget improves, let's hope he can afford better cameras. Especially in low light, the quality drops markedly.

The story is about the after effects of an armoured truck robbery. A badly injured and stressed out drifter drives into a small town, stops for a badly-needed drink, and tells the people in the bar about a chest of money he buried just out of town. He leaves, but the next day others arrive looking for the chest. There is the owner of the money, bent on its recovery and his revenge on the man who stole from him.

The young and inexperienced policeman is trying to track down the thief or thieves. Since most of the town now also knows about the money, we also have two of the local rednecks in the search. Into this mix come three young tourists who are stuck in town for a couple of days while their car is fixed. One of them inadvertently finds the money and all hell breaks loose as each group tries to take it.

There are high levels of quite graphic violence throughout the film.

Although they are strongly relevant to the plot, and show just how desperate some people are to get some money to get themselves out of the dying town, I don't think it's going to survive the censors uncut.

Josh Gaboian in his role as Wiley, the local redneck, is brilliant. He starts out as an obedient sidekick, but under pressure he snaps and starts a killing spree. Gaboian particularly plays the out-of-control Wiley with skill and even generates a certain amount of sympathy – all he desperately wants is a new start. Bernadette Jantas makes the most of her role as the bar owner and local mechanic.

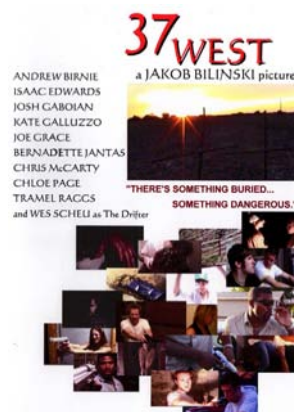
She plays it as street-wise, friendly, but bored in the small town. In the final showdown will she be strong enough to stand up to Wiley?

Tramel Raggs and Andrew Birnie are rather unconvincing as the owner of the money and the policeman trying to track it down. This is not because of their acting skills but because the script does not allow their roles in the story to develop much. Their partnership is an unlikely one, and the presence of a single detective also seems unlikely given the amount of money involved.

The script could perhaps have been polished a little more, but how much can you do on a limited budget?

Instead the film relies on that curious thing about some successful independents – it works so well because the cast and crew really believe in what they are doing and give it their absolute best.

Web: <http://www.cinephreakpictures.com/>



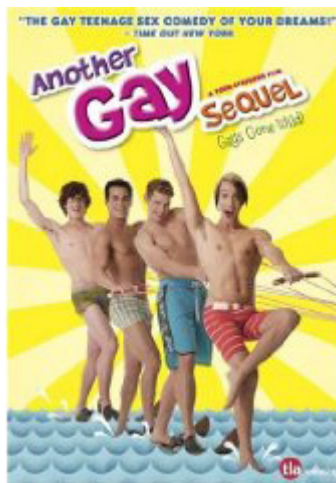
**Another Gay
Sequel
Gays Gone Wild
R1 DVD
TLA Releasing
2008**

Another Gay Sequel: Gays Gone Wild is a fun, satirical, witty and raunchy sex comedy. It ridicules every possible teen comedy from American Pie to Girls Gone Wild. At the same time it packs a punch, at times it is outrageously crude with shit, vomit and golden showers, other times perhaps insightful as it makes a call for diversity beyond the "muscle bound" clones of the Gay party crowd. However, don't expect too much depth; this is primarily a fast moving politically incorrect gay comedy.

In Another Gay Movie, four openly gay school friends spent their summer together discovering themselves and each one trying to be the first "bottom". In the follow-up they are on spring break in Fort Lauderdale at an outrageous gay resort. The resort's coordinator, RuPaul, and compeer, Lady Bunny, arrange the entertainment which ranges from orgies to wet Speedo competitions. The biggest comp of the weekend is "Gays Gone Wild", to see who can clock up the most sex.

The four friends soon hit bad luck as they have to battle against The Jaspers, who won the competition last year and are not above dirty tricks to win again. These range from evil tikis to giving the boys crabs and replacing their lube with glue.

While this is certainly a raunchy and explicit sex comedy with enough off-colour content to scare away any but the most daring, it also includes



Crabs, Crabs and Crabs

some interesting explorations of relationships, commitment and diversity. Boyfriends Griff and Jarod work to define the boundaries of their open relationship.

Andy, who is normally happy with wild promiscuity falls in love and Nico, comes to understand the nature of being an outsider and falls in love with a merman (gay mermaid). In the final climatic scene, Nico comes to understand the "true" nature of being an "individual" and while the "smooth bodies" of the in-crowd bonk away, Nico and the geeks, outsiders, trannys and bears celebrate with their own orgy and Nico wins the competition.

Along the way we meet a range of well known gay personalities including Amanda Lepore, RuPaul, Lady Bunny, Lypsinka, Perez Hilton and a plethora of cameo's including many gay porn stars such as Michael Lucas and Brent Corrigan.

There is lots of rather nice flesh on display with more than enough bodies of all shapes and sizes to keep you more than interested. The sex ranges from S & M to three ways and orgies so is fun for the open minded. Certainly many of the cameos (suck as porn stars Brent Corrigan as the Merman and Michael Lucas as the Pizza Man) give the film some extra laughs.

The humour is certainly on the wild side with fun sub plots including Perez Hilton finding (and losing God) and send ups of movies ranging from The Wizard of Oz to Night of the Living Dead. Much of the humour is very "in" gay humour which is culture specific and hence many of the references will not be easily understood unless you are in on the joke. That being said, it is a damn good laugh and it is nice to see an adventurous comedy which can laugh at the subject so many people take so seriously—sex.



The Jaspers

A Sense of History
Mike Leigh
Hopscotch
Films

Reviewer
Bob Estreich



This is one of those finely-tuned little pieces of subtle but savage British satire that creeps up on you. It's a short film at 22 minutes, but is made in the style of a documentary narrated by the 23rd Earl of Leete. He describes how his family has owned and farmed the estate for hundreds of years, and how he sees it as his duty to pass it on to his son and heir, slightly larger than it was when he received it from his wastrel father. He is making this documentary "to demonstrate that, at the very centre of my life, there has been a sense of history".

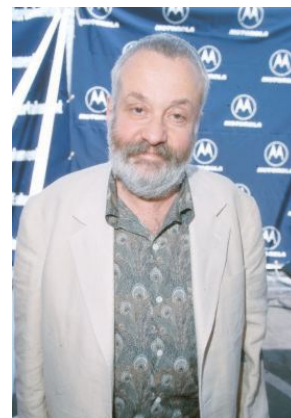
As he shows us around the estate, it all seems pretty much what we would expect from the remaining landed gentry – a rather Victorian sense of pride in his family line, a touch of elitism, resentment at outside interference. Then it starts to go subtly wrong as he talks about clearing the woodland, introducing chemical fertilizers, and clearing the hedgerows so he can mechanize the farm.

His father sold off large tracts of the estate, and he sees it as his duty to enlarge it again. Unfortunately his elder brother, who would have inherited the title, was "a bit dim" and what is more he "was probably a homosexual". The Earl describes how, aged just over seven, he realised that there was only one thing he could do – kill his brother. With the murder successfully accomplished he was sent off to school. When World War 2 broke out it was naturally assumed that he would enter the army and fight for King and Country, This did not happen. He professes his admiration for Mr Hitler who got a bankrupt country back on its feet again, and how he could not be expected to fight against a man he admired. Instead he spent the war buying up neighbouring properties and enlarging the estate.

He also married to gain more land and his wife bore him two children. Unfortunately she showed no understanding when he wanted to divorce her to marry a working girl. His homicidal tendencies took over again. It is around this point that we realise that, in spite of his touching and somewhat sad belief in the importance of family and history, that he is really stark

raving mad.

He loses it briefly and rants on about "accountants, communists, the EuroBureau-brusselssprouts, motorway builders, golf course designers, property developers, parachutists, bloody Ramblers Association..." and all the others who have designs on his family's lands.



Mike Leigh

The film is a satire on the traditional English attitudes of the rich, ruling class, and an excellent spoof on the documentaries that feature these attitudes. They may now be all but extinct, but Broadbent and Leigh recreate them for us in this marvellous satire that is as good as the finer moments of Michael Palin's Ripping Yarns.

Jim Broadbent graduated from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in 1972. He quickly gained a reputation as a character actor, and although he appeared in a number of serious films and TV shows such as Moulin Rouge, he also had parts in Time Bandits and Brazil, both directed by Terry Gilliam. He also had the role of the voice of Vroomfondel in the radio adaptation of Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy. It appears that in spite of his rather classical training, a sense of irreverent humour runs deep in his psyche as well. In his earlier periods he worked on two films with director Mike Leigh, and this film was the third. If you want to see a current work, watch for him in Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.

The film was originally made in 1992, but has been re-released as part of a Mike Leigh set. This is the only source from which it is currently available. Leigh was renowned for only directing his own work, so directing this work written by someone else shows how deep their friendship was.

Nominated for Best Short Film at the BAFTA Film Awards in 1993 Won the Audience Award at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival in the same year.

If you like British humour, this is one you must have.

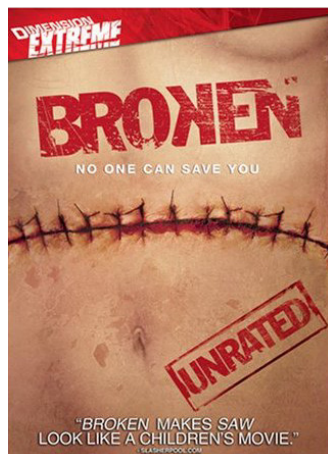
Broken
Dimension
Extreme
Unrated Edition
Genius R1 DVD

Broken is a challenging, visceral and harrowing journey into violence, torture and death. It is not for the faint hearted and at times seems unnecessary vicious. It could even be said to revel in its depiction of torture. It is not an easy film to watch and could easily be placed in the "torture porn" category except it does have some interesting and nuanced performances and its exploration of the nature of "power" in relationships, especially between captive and captor, elevates it above films normally found in the "torture porn" genre.

The storyline centres on a nameless woman (the credits call her Hope) who meets what seems to be a nice young man on a date, they discuss her family background in some detail and she hopes to see him again on the weekend. How this is connected to what happens next is not made clear, but she wakes up in a hole in the ground.

She has a pain in her abdomen and spends the day disoriented, without water and claustrophobic. She tries to push her way out of her prison, but cannot escape. The next day (each day is noted on the screen), she is set free, knocked out and then tied to a tree, her feet are balanced precariously on a piece of wood. Across from her is the dead body of the previous victim. We come to realize (in flashbacks) that her captor has "tested" various women, one failed and disembowelled herself, the other pulled the trigger on his gun despatching herself to eternity. He wants a strong woman for whatever he has planned. The next day arrives.

The only way that Hope can escape is by using the sharpened stick he has given her to cut open the stitches in her stomach, retrieve a razor blade and cut through the rope around her neck before falling off the wood and hanging herself, never mind avoiding disembowelment while she works! She succeeds in her task, is retrieved from the ground, patched up, fed and allowed to recuperate. This first section of the film is extremely harrowing and the violence



and gore is equally matched with psychological terror. Hope now becomes his slave, she cannot find out where her child is and he slowly conditions her to her new role. He refuses to use her name and makes her scrub pots, look after the garden and become what he sees to be "his partner".

He does not rape her; he has only sex with her after she has seemingly voluntarily entered into the new arrangement. He does not realize that her acceptance is faked and she steals a key and tries to escape (after partially slashing his leg), he breaks her leg and drags her back to camp.

The story becomes more complicated as he travels away for seven or eight days and returns with a young school age girl. It is as though he is attempting to create an artificial family. When she refuses to fit into his plan by constantly crying and screaming, he cuts out her tongue and uses Hope as a lever to control her behaviour. After a long period of time Hope seems to be identifying with the situation (Stockholm Syndrome), but when the girl escapes and is killed, Hope snaps and kills her captor with a metal bar in an especially violent scene.

The final horrific twist is when she finds her daughter alive in a cabin near where she has been held captive. However, when she opens the door it lets loose a trap and shoots pellets into her face, she truly will not see her daughter again.

This is a cruel movie which at times seems to focus way too much on the violence. There is no doubt the captor is depraved but I am not sure you need to show so much detail to make your point, the cathartic killing by Hope

The Harrowing Experience of Broken



at the end is understandable but again a bit overplayed. The heart of this film seems to be the psychological power relationship that exists between the captor and Hope through his desire to create an "artificial" family via force. The way in which Hope slowly comes to accept and even perhaps participate in her new role is especially unnerving. This is a fascinating concept and is explored in many subtle ways, for example, when Hope finally leaves the camp, she looks back at the chains which held her legs and her vegetable patch with what could even be described as a sense of loss.

The exploration of the captor-captive bond and what is clinically known as the Stockholm Syndrome is far more intriguing than the close-ups of Hope fingering her open wound trying to get a razor out. Sure, it helps set the dark, vicious and depraved nature of the captor's madness, but I still think less could have been more. I have no problems with extreme violence when it serves a purpose; here I wonder if it actually took something away from what is otherwise a very powerful film.

I found Broken a challenging and gut wrenching cinematic experience, many people will turn off due to the excessive violence, however, if you can deal with the harrowing ride it ends up being an interesting journey.

The Chosen One Indican Pictures R1 DVD

Reviewers:

Jeremy & Renata
Kong

WINNER — Best
Experimental Feature
2007 Ft. Lauderdale
International Film
Festival

HONOURABLE MENTION — 2008 Bi-National
Independent Film Festival
OFFICIAL SELECTION — 2008 Newport Beach
Film Festival
OFFICIAL SELECTION — 2008 Comic-Con
International Independent Film Festival

Voice Cast:

Tim Curry (Scary Movie 2, Spamalot, Rocky
Horror Picture Show, The Three Musketeers)
Traci Lords (Zack & Miri Make a Porno, Cry

Baby, Blade, Melrose Place)
Chris Sarandon (The Nightmare Before
Christmas, Dog Day Afternoon, Princess Bride)
Debra Wilson (Mad TV, Speed Racer, Reno
911)
Danielle Fishel (Boy Meets World, Dorm Daze,
Dorm Daze 2)
Lance Henriksen (Aliens, Alien V Predator, Ap-
paloosa, Super Nova, Millennium)
Laura Prepon (October Road, That '70's Show)

Plot Synopsis

Lou Hanske is your typical layabout loser who is forced out of College for being a perpetual student; loses his job, his girlfriend, and his car; pisses off a foreign power; and then gets attacked by a bear.

Broke and owing thousands, Lou is forced to room with a down and out old guy, Zebulon, who introduces him to the Church of Frank. The crackpot Church informs him that he is "The Chosen One" and that he has a mission from God. All he has to do is get to Kansas in one day and receive the word of God on a mountain... after which the Church will give him \$30,000.

Lou, Zeb, and Lou's only other remaining friend, Donna, take a road-trip to Kansas, that is full of surprises and excitement. They get some help and guidance from an unexpected source, and are hounded by a group of mercenaries hired by a union of Western Religions who desperately don't want The Chosen One to succeed.

Will Lou and his travelling companions make it in time to talk to God?

Will the Western Religions succeed in their plot to destroy The Chosen One?

Is The Chosen One a force for Good or for Evil?????

The Verdict

Firstly, while it is not perfect, it has a real 'sneak up and grab you' charm about it, and it is certainly deserving of the awards it has received.

Even though this is an animated film, don't let this lull you into thinking it's a piece of fluff. It successfully comments on the big questions in life: Does having it all really make you happy?





Are happiness and bliss all they're cracked up to be? Can we have world peace? What is the nature of human existence? Are giant robot Ninjas effective security? Can Satan do the one thing even he has been too afraid to do??

It deals with some very interesting philosophical questions without ever being heavy handed or blatantly preachy. While religion, faith and God are major components of the film, the writers have presented them in such a preposterously funny way that it, paradoxically, allows you to consider the movie's concepts totally outside the framework of religion.

The animation is edgy and may irritate some people. It is a cross between South Park and The Wiggles Cartoons where there is a simple colour scheme with basic geometric shapes. The shading is limited so things look 2D, and once again the shading is done as geometric shapes, rather than graduated shading. The movements are jerky and reminiscent of stop-motion technique, and the lip syncing is haphazard. The dialogue is not polished, however, the screenplay is good and packed full of humour and satire.

For me, a highlight in the dialogue comes from the head of the Eastern religions: when told that the Chosen One has been found he says "Hmmm. Well, whatever happens, happens. Want a cookie?!".

The simplistic quality of the screenplay, animation and dialogue means that the message of the film sneaks up and slaps you in the face, and allows you to have an "A-ha" moment. I think a slick production would have overwhelmed the message and reduced the film's impact.

The voice actors had 2 standouts. Chad Fifer is

well cast (self-cast) as the whiney, self-involved Lou, and he sounds a lot like Owen Wilson (You, Me & Dupree, and Wedding Crashers). Tim Curry, as always, is fantastic as the sultry voice of the enigmatic and complex Lucifer.

Most of the other voice actors are good, but Traci Lords, as Miss Sultry, is horribly annoying. Her voice is so soft, and she mumbles so much, that you cannot hear her lines properly unless you turn up the sound and blow yourself out of your chair when anyone else speaks!

It is a little bit slow here and there, and some people may find it difficult to get into (particularly if they are not fans of animated films), but there is certainly a lot to be commended about this film. It is worthwhile persevering to the end, in order to get your A-ha moment.... and perhaps, reach enlightenment!

Make sure you access the Special Features menu and select "The Story of the Chosen One -as told by an Old Man over Pictures of Cats" (I kid you not). It tells the story of the ups and downs in making the film, and it is a really interesting, quirky and funny piece. I'll bet you've never seen anything like it!

Indican Pictures

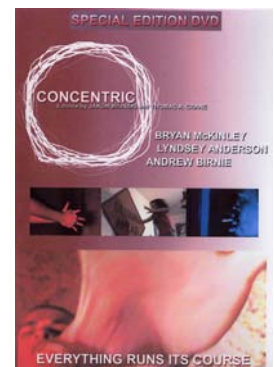
Web: <http://www.IndicanPictures.com>

Concentric Cinephreak Pictures

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Jake Bilinski is a young (mid 20s) independent film producer who already has a number of films under his belt. Unfortunately, some of them show his relative inexperience. Mime is a strange comedy about a mime who is put on trial for miming a murder.

Somehow, it just didn't work for me in spite of competent technical work. Foxy Madonna is an attempt at a seventies style drama, and the less said the better. Concentric, however, shows where Bilinski's talent lies.



The story revolves around three friends – the laid-back Brent (Bryan McKinley), his likeable but somewhat unstable pill-popping friend Zeke (Andrew Birnie), and Zeke's girlfriend Lana (Lyndsey Anderson). Brent has a not-so-secret crush on Lana, but respects Zeke and Lana and remains best friends with both. Zeke is getting deeper into trouble with Daxx, the local drug supplier. He is starting to become erratic in his behaviour, and to treat Lana badly as the pressure increases on him.

Things turn really bad when a bag of money that Zeke was to use to pay off his supplier goes missing. He is desperate and starts to lose control, and confides in Brent that Lana has taken the money and is trying to kill him. Lana in turn tells Brent that Zeke has lost it completely, has bashed her, and is now out to kill her, believing that she has stolen the money.

She packs a bag and leaves Zeke's home with Brent for a safer place to stay. Zeke tracks them down and a confrontation follows. Brent must decide which one is lying to him, because it looks like he is going to have to kill one of them.

The film is not presented in this linear way, but rather as a set of flashbacks from Brent's point of view. His flashbacks are interpreted according to what he knew at the time, and we follow him as he must work out who is lying to him and why. Because each segment is seen from his perspective at the time, they do not necessarily make linear sense – later events will clear up the confusion as the story unfolds.

The three actors play their roles well. I particularly liked Birnie as he shows the changes from carefree college student to drug dealer in deep trouble – not exactly a sympathetic character, but you can empathise with him as events get out of his control.

Through it all, McKinley plays the steady anchor character as events change, until finally the test of his own character arrives. Lyndsey Anderson's part should be difficult – why does her character put up with a boyfriend who increasingly treats her like dirt as his own world falls apart? She plays the part sympathetically and makes it believable as their relationship degrades.

Thomas Crane, who co-wrote the script, has produced a competent film

on a limited budget. His rather stark camera work increases the tension and the minimalist low-budget look seems to enhance the final product. You can concentrate on the plotline rather than the backgrounds.

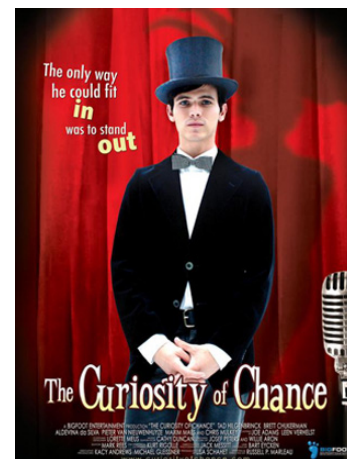
The film is a very good little dark suspense drama, and shows what can be done with a limited budget but competent skills. We are going to see a lot more of Bilinski's work if he can keep up this standard.

Web: <http://www.cinephreakpictures.com/>

The Curiosity of Chance Beyond Home Entertainment R4 DVD

Russell P. Marleau's "The Curiosity of Chance" is a very different sort of gay film; it takes its lead from such Eighties films such as "Pretty in Pink" and "The Breakfast Club," but subverts the context to create a new and more challenging focus.

While in most Eighties films we have similar images of the sport jocks, the annoying school officials, the self assured if not street wise African American teen, the geek and the gay male, in this film the gay character takes centre stage.



Levi and Chance





Chance and Levi, Hank is in the car.

What is especially interesting is this is not another “coming out” film, Chance is already very sure of his sexuality; it is his identity he is exploring. The emphasis is not on his sexuality or his family issues (while they come into it), but into his development of confidence and self esteem.

Chance Marquis has just moved to a new town (which seems to be in Europe somewhere) and a new school. He is not only gay, but his mother has died and he feels isolated from his father.

His father accepts his sexuality but does not really know how to communicate with him as he is a military type. Chance likes to wear outrageous outfits to keep the world at bay and this increases his difficulties at school. He develops new friends in the street wise Twyla and the nerdy photographer Hank.

He has also developed an interest in Levi, who lives next door, and whose major love is music but whose father is pushing him into a football scholarship. But life is still hard, the school sports jock has it in for Chance and takes every opportunity to ridicule him and has intimidated Levi into keeping Chance at a distance.

Chance finds some joy in life escaping to a gay club in the city and decides to give drag a try. However, things don't go to plan, when the bully's girlfriend steals a photo from Hank and

the whole school is covered with flyers depicting his gender bending experience. By this stage Levi has had enough and smacks the bully down – it also seems Levi seems to be coming to terms with his own identity, maybe even his sexuality.

While on leave from school, Chance and Levi hook up and enter into the battle of the bands and with the help from some drag queens bring down the show with a celebration of difference.

The movie ends with a prolonged kiss between Chance and Levi which may or may not be Chance's fantasy since the film is told first person from Chance's memories and reflections. This ambiguity adds to the film's charm and playfulness.

This is a feel good gay film, it could easily have fallen into sentimentality but it keeps an edge of reality about it. Chance is nicely played by Hilgenbrink and avoids making the role clichéd, Levi is gorgeous and the dynamism between them is palpable.

The scenes with the school sports jock/bully are carefully directed as to not make the film too violent or depressing but at the same time to remind us of how difficult life still is for those who are different.

What is so interesting about The Curiosity of Chance is that the focus is not so much about being gay as so much as finding an identity and this can be a difficult journey for someone of any sexual persuasion and this gives the film a universal appeal.

By making it clear that Chance has already comes to terms with his sexuality the film focuses on how we develop self esteem and confidence albeit through an extravagant and colourful tale, full of Eighties references and some very fun drag !

Web: <http://www.thecuriosityofchance.com>

Australian Distributor:
Beyond Entertainment

DAAS Gold
Doug Anthony All Stars
The Unlimited Uncollectible Sterling Deluxe
Edition
R4 DVD
ABC DVD
Distributed by Roadshow

The Doug Anthony All Stars (DAAS) were an outrageous Australian musical comedy trio who performed together between 1984 and 1994, they are still individually well known in the Australian TV and comedy field. DAAS was comprised of Tim Ferguson, Paul McDermott and Richard Fidler.

Influenced by punk, satirical comedy and performance art they began as a Canberra busking band with outrageous and controversial performances, such as Paul setting himself alight and jumping into a clothing bin ! They won the Pick of the Fringe at the Adelaide Fringe Festival but continued to be a local phenomenon until they performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1987. Surprisingly their immediate successes was in the UK not Australia where they performed on a wide range of television programs and developed a large following. They achieved their big break in Australia when the ABC created the Big Gig comedy show in 1989. They became a regular feature on the program helping it achieve great success, indeed it would be difficult to think of the Big Gig without them.

They left in 1991 and wrote their own ABC comedy series DAAS Kapital, which while somewhat successful is seen by many as being less than stellar, they stopped performing in 1994 and went on to have individual careers.

Looking back the most successful period for



The Doug Anthony All Stars

DAAS was 1989 -1991 on the Big Gig and on the tour circuit around Australia. The Big Gig gave them a truly sympathetic audience for their controversial and outrageous behavior, bad taste songs and intelligent yet sarcastic humour.

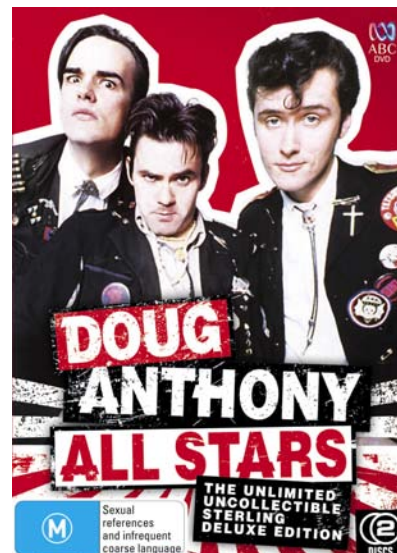
Episode after episode they came up with new and more outrageous material lampooning everything from the Hare Krishna movement to feminism, Christianity to Marxism, it was heady and fun stuff. Yet always had a talented musical style which made it different from various other forms of stand up comedy. They regularly pushed the edge of the envelope and when people wrote in and complained they would read the complaints on the next episode with ridicule and disdain !

They developed a truly devoted fan base which has continued even long after their demise, re-runs on cable helped bring a range of new fans into the fold. They produced a number of videos, 5 CDs (five live and 1 studio album) and various books.

Many of us who saw their antics on the Big Gig did not expect to see the shows again except on Cable TV, while various videos and CDS were released, the Big Gig shows were never put on video. To have a full set of all the DAAS segments from the Big Gig in their original glory is a true fans delight, it even includes a commentary by Tim, Richard and Paul !!

This superb collection includes 28 episodes from the two series with such truly memorable numbers as Commies for Christ, Dead Elvis, Krishna Riding Shotgun and the moving Heard It through The Grapevine.

While many Australian comedy trios have tried to emulate their success, none have come even close. The DAAS offered a unique mixture of Monty Pythonesque humour blended with a superb musical style and a sharp street edge which made them unique in the history of Australian comedy, it is for this reason they continue to be so loved today !

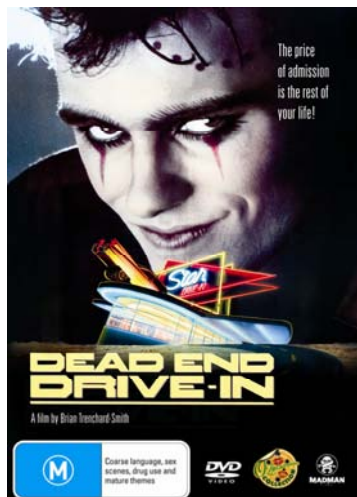


Dead End Drive-In
R4 DVD
Madman Ent.

Dead End Drive-In is a classic example of Australian genre cinema, exploitation at its most bizarre. This was the Eighties when Post Apocalyptic cinema ruled and Mad Max was the success story of the day. Cult film director Brian Trenchard-Smith was a rather successful maverick filmmaker and decided to have a go at making a film of the short story Crabs by well known Australian author Peter Carey.

The opening titles set the scene: race wars in South Africa, a second Wall Street crash and huge riots during Australia's bicentennial year, a prelude to the use of emergency powers by the government. You think you are in for a serious examination of the state of a world in decline, and then the film starts....

Crabs is a skinny runt, his brother is big and strong and runs a pick-up truck company which must fight against other companies, corrupt police and gangs of car obsessed street trash to make his living. Crabs yearns to be like his big brother but instead works as a delivery boy in a mini. The first scenes of the film illustrate the two major themes which run throughout, cars and post apocalyptic culture. I certainly thought the second Wall Street fall and the collapse of financial systems rather ominous considering



the state of the present day world economic system.

Crabs convinces his brother to lend him his Chevy (his brother's pride and joy). He decides to use it to impress Carmen his girlfriend and go to the drive in a goodtime. When they arrive they find Turkey Shoot (another Trenchard-Smith spectacular) on the big screen, not that they see any of it. In the middle of their rather passionate lovemaking the car grinds and lurches and Crabs finds his wheels have been stolen. However, it doesn't end there, they have been taken by the police who patrol the drive-in and hence getting them back is not an option.

In the morning they try and report them stolen and discuss getting home and get a very rude shock. There is no transport or cabs from the drive-in and the highway that leads to it is patrolled as a no walking zone and those caught get three months in jail. It seems the drive-in is used by the government as an unofficial youth prison to get trouble makers off the street. Crabs and Carmel must now live on the free junk food and drugs provided and turn the car into their home.

In a world with rampant youth crime and violence, the "Dead End Drive-In" seems to be the government's solution to street crime. However, Crabs is not seduced by this supposedly easy life and wants out. Of course, this is not as simple as it seems as he must battle against petty criminals, others who want his car parts and the police and government.

This is a strange and rather silly film which brings together what seems to be the major obsessions of Australia in the Eighties – cars and the Apocalypse. This is no Mad Max, but it is fun, eccentric and above all great exploitation cinema. There is lots of action, lots of flesh and lots of teen rebellion. Cars, accidents and road wars rule and the fight scenes are kind of cool.

The Star Drive-In becomes the Dead End Drive-In



This release from Madman is faultless, to the honest the perfect quality of the print, which literally has no signs of wear, is probably far more than the film deserves!!

The sound is Dolby Digital 2.00 and so clear your ears will complain about the constant Eighties soundtrack.

The Devil's Chair
R4 DVD
Sony 2008

Nick is a fairly typical vacant street-wise young man who decides to take his girlfriend to an abandoned asylum for a bit of fun. Together they drop acid, at Nick's insistence, to have a strange trip in a dark place. They have no idea of how dark it will get. As the drugs begin to hit they go upstairs and find a strange chair. It looks like a cross between a piece of gothic furniture and an electric chair.



When his girlfriend sits in the chair it locks her in, tortures her and kills her. Nick freaks out and is found covered in blood, there is no sign of her body. His version of events is garbled to say the least and all this talk of a murderous chair is not taken especially seriously. He is declared mental incompetent and placed in an institution.

Four years later and after lots of therapy and meds he is offered a limited release with the condition that he enters into an investigation of his psychotic break with a professor of psychiatry, who is writing a book.

Throughout the film we are treated to Nick's unique view of the world as a form of continual "internal" dialogue, it is vicious, disturbed and violent. It is an element which constantly makes you wonder whether Nick is guilty or not, while we "see" the chair kill his girlfriend (through Nick's eyes), his internal dialogue seems to suggest something else is going on.

Even in these early scenes you wonder whether what you are seeing is "real" or simply Nick's perspective of the world.

When Nick meets the team involved in the investigation again you wonder where the edge between reality and fantasy really is. The team seems to be "archetypal" and would fit well into any horror classic. There is the old mad professor, the sarcastic male student, the sensitive caring female and the bitch.

Are these characters really as they "are" or are

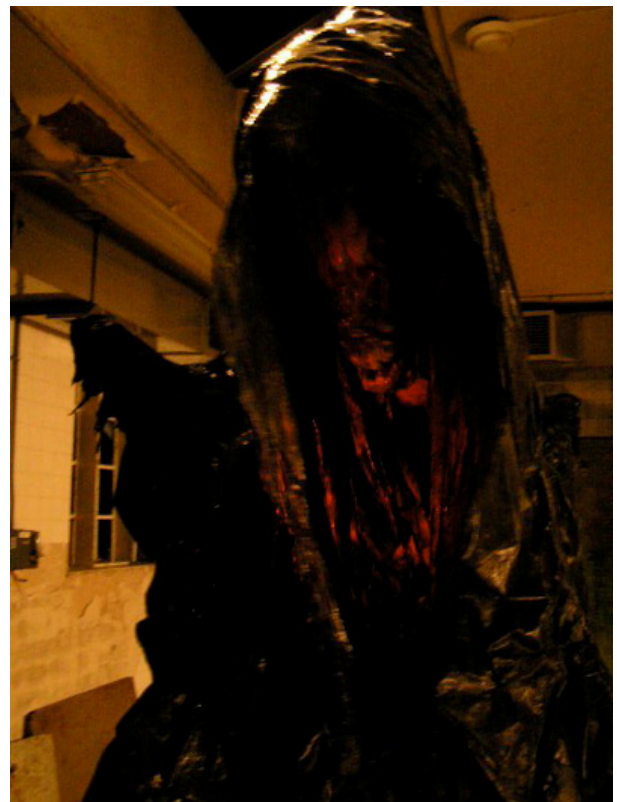
we, again, seeing them through Nick's eyes? This is further emphasized by the way Nick calls the professor "Gandalf" and various other horror and fantasy film references.

When they reach the abandoned institution, they set up for the night and Nick begins to fall apart. The professor takes Nick aside and tells him that he believes his story and that the chair is a gateway to another world. He outlines the history of the Asylum and its role in illegal experimentation on patients and how the head of the institution developed a means to separate the soul from the body.

Before long a number of them have "gone over" and as Nick goes into the other world to save the day, we realize that the professor is actually using them as food for a demon on the other side.

The story gets stranger and stranger with some amazing special effects and occult themes, this section of the film has strong resonances with the work of H.P. Lovecraft and Clive Barker and such films as From Beyond and Hellraiser.

As the occult themes become more and more extreme you begin to question the authenticity of what you are seeing, isn't it all too "clear cut?" – doesn't it all fit together just a bit too



A Demon from Another World or Is it ?

easily ? Above all - Isn't it all a bit clichéd ?

However, you are so caught up in the chase through the underworld with bloodthirsty demons and dark hallways and tunnels that you don't give it a second thought until reality hits.

Just as you begin to accept that Nick is innocent and that The Devil's Chair is about some great occult conspiracy led by the professor and maybe you are even a bit let down by the clichéd nature of the plot - you are brought crashing back into reality.

The observation made "there was no chair" is so simple and yet so profound. Nick was and still is, a psychopathic killer. The whole story of the chair etc may or may not be in Nick's imagination, but in any event he clearly knows exactly what he is doing and he does it with abandon. This is not to say he is not mad nor that he does not on some level believe the fantasy he creates, but that it simply serves a function.

The final section of the film is a total shock compared to the rest; it is bloody, grisly, gore ridden and brutal, it moves quickly from a horror fantasy to a slasher and certainly grabs you by the throat.

Nick clearly has a grasp on reality and knows he must kill the team to escape back into the world and does so with great relish.

This is an unusual horror film in that it deliberately plays with the conventions of traditional horror filmmaking. The more horror films and classic horror tales you have read and seen you the more you will get taken in by Nick's storytelling, what you "see" are Nick's deliberate take on events, his interpretation of reality.

Of course the question is left open whether Nick really believed he was part of a Lovecraftian horror story or whether he was simply a psychopath, or maybe even both ! There are lots of possible ways to appreciate this tale. However, considering that he intensely kisses his nonexistent girlfriend at the end of the film, either interpretation is possible.

The Devil's Chair is well made, superbly acted and has a plot which is surprisingly creative. It really is an unusual take on the horror genre and quite an original work of cinema.

**Edgar Allan Poe's
House of Usher
David DeCoteau
R1 DVD
Regent
Entertainment**

The movie is loosely based on the Edgar Allan Poe classic short story, The Fall of the House of Usher but with a very decidedly homoerotic twist. DeCoteau has taken a traditional tale of mystery and horror and filled it with stunning physiques, lust and love and a very classic gothic look.

On what is clearly a low budget, he has been able to create a real sense of the macabre. The look of the house, the moody music score, the carefully placed camera angles, all create a sense that the house is much more than it seems.

Even the dolls and toys in the children's room give a shiver up the spine. It features a superb voice over which gives it a truly classic gothic feel.

The classic tale has been adapted to a gay sensibility with very hot gay love scenes, a sexy butler, gay ghosts and lots of men running around in their undies – this is high camp horror which is both rather fun and seductive !

DeCoteau is well known for his camp film sensibilities and sense of play and this film embodies everything about his unique approach to cinema.

**Usher
Sexy but very Dangerous....**





Underwear Ghosts

in many years. His parents died many years before and his sister is unstable and behaves erratically.

Roderick seems in a very bad way and obviously needs Victor's special affection to return to health, but Victor is not as yet willing to recommit to a relationship which occurred so long ago and is the only gay relationship of his life.

There seems to be an air of mystery about the house, three of the workman who undertook repairs on it (all very good looking, of course), died under strange circumstances and the butler seems to be hiding a secret. Slowly strange and bizarre events begin to haunt Victor including visions of the death workmen running around in their underwear and then naked. Frightening visions perhaps but certainly also erotic.

It seems his very life essence is being drawn away and he must fight for his very survival. Slowly, Victor realizes that both his friend and the house have a dark past that no one has lived to uncover.

As the film reaches its climax, we find Victor in a mental institution which looks very much like the House of Usher with the various characters from the tale as its staff.

Was it all a nightmare ?
We are left wondering....

Regent Entertainment

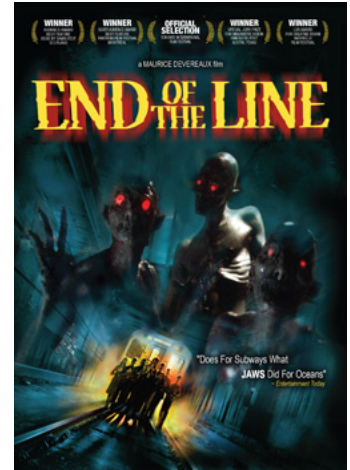
Web: <http://www.regententertainment.com>

Victor Reynolds, a rather attractive young man (Michael Cardelle) receives a desperate letter from his childhood friend and first love, Roderick Usher (Frank Mentier).

He arrives to find that Roderick has become a recluse and not left the mansion

End of the Line Anchor Bay R4 DVD

End of the Line is an extremely nerve wracking horror film which offers a very different take on the apocalypse using an aberrant Christian sect as its central focus.



The film opens as Karen, who works as a nurse in a psychiatric ward finds more and more of her patients obsessed with demons. It is a full moon and a lunar eclipse and new patients are flooding in raving and screaming. She receives devastating news that one of her patients has committed suicide by throwing herself under a train; she looks and reflects on the demon infested art that Vivienne has left behind. She leaves work exhausted and emotionally drained.

As she boards the train home things get quickly out of control. The train is filled with uniformed members of the Church of Hope who sit and sing together. Suddenly they all receive a beeper message and decide to get about the Lord's work to save as many people as possible.

However, their method of Salvation is via a crucifix shaped dagger as they believe that only through death can people avoid the demonic plague which will begin with the start of Armageddon. As they slaughter with abandon and heavenly praise they send a shiver up your spine as they reflect so many extreme trends in modern religion.



**Friendly Christians ready to save mankind
via the knife !!**

Karen and a small group escape the train and now must try and make it out of the subway. It sounds like such a simple plot, doesn't it ? Well in the right hands the simplest plot and a moderate budget can make a great film and this one is truly creepy. The dark tunnels of the subway filled with shadows, half light and insane Christians armed with crucifix knives provide a constant suspenseful experience.

The character development is impressive with a group of survivors you really like, unusual in modern horror. The true believers are utterly terrifying, from their larger than life preacher who appears on a TV screen demanding the world be cleansed to the lovely old lady who supervises the killing. She is epitome of what seems to be a nice old Church woman yet here she is demanding blood and death in an attempt to save the world.

There are many powerful scenes in this film and it could be said that it is clearly critical of Christianity in its various forms. The way in which a young girl is killed because she has been "sullied" by sex and now must be shunned is a powerful reflection of Christian Puritanism and the tormented Church lieutenant who wishes to rape and have a good time before sending people to paradise is a very disturbing character to say the least.

There are so many different resonances in this film from David Koresh to the Aum Cult, when finally they have "saved" (read: killed) enough people they feed each other a suicide pill in true Jim Jones fashion. Yet as the film end a new evil seems to arrive, are they demons or is Karen going into shock ? We are left wondering....

The violence in End of the Line is well done but not overemphasized, sure there is lots of blood and some solid knife, axe and hammer action but it is used as part of the story not for its own sake, but do be ready for lots of great shocks. The scene when the husband and wife are killed and her baby dragged out and left beside them is certainly harrowing.

This is a different sort of horror film with an excellent plot, solid character acting and a very disturbing premise.

It kept me on the edge of my seat for the whole time and I will certainly check my back next time I am in the subway !

Hellboy II: The Golden Army Universal R4 DVD



Hellboy II is really quite an achievement, it is not often that a sequel offers more than its predecessor and yet Guillermo del Toro has achieved just that. Hellboy II offers more spectacle, imagination and sheer outrageous fantasy than anyone could ever have expected and yet matches this with strong character development and, well, lots of heart. You actually feel for the trio of leads and their emotional entanglements. In a strange sort of way it is because of their less than human appearance and strange abilities that their powerful humanity becomes more apparent.

It seems the power of love is a force than seduces all races and this brings a depth to the fantasy of Hellboy II which could have very easily become an overwhelming phantasmagoria of creatures and monsters. To be sure, creatures there certainly are, from ectoplasmic ghosts to golden mechanical robots, to bone and teeth eating fairies to monsters of all sorts, this is fantasy at its most fantastic.

The story opens with a nice childlike Christmas scene, except Hellboy is the kid waiting for Santa and the tale is one of a war between the humans and the otherfolk. After the humans have attacked time and time again and left their numbers sorely diminished, the otherfolk develop an Army of Golden Robots which cannot be destroyed, repairing themselves each they are attacked. They slaughter humanity with abandon and win the war without effort but with great bloodshed.

The King of these other races (which includes everything from trolls to goblins, fairies to monsters) feels pity for those who have lost their lives on both sides and enters a truce. The otherfolk get the countryside and the forests and the human get the cities.

The Golden Army is controlled by a special crown which can only be used if unchallenged. The King breaks it into pieces and gives one to the humans and divides the remaining pieces among himself and his family. While the King and his daughter accept the truce, Prince Nuada does not trust the humans and exiles



Hellboy Versus the Prince

himself from the kingdom.

As centuries pass the earth has changed much from these early days, the forests have been destroyed and the countryside laid waste. Prince Nuada wants the humans to pay for their disrespect and with the help of a very angry troll called "Wink" gets hold of the human's segment of the crown.

He confronts his father, sister and the council, but they will not agree to war. He decides to take matters into his own hands and kills his father and the battle begins to stop the prince awakening the Golden Army and destroying mankind.

Along the way, however, Abe and Hellboy, have to deal with the new experience of very human emotions. Hellboy comes to understand he will be a father and Abe falls in love with Princess Nuada and risks everything to have her and sadly experiences the pangs of loss.

The CGI in Hellboy II is impeccable but at the same time Abe, Hellboy and the various creatures and monsters truly inhabit their characters and come across as believable and authentic and this is no mean considering just how bizarre so many of them are. There are

The CGI in Hellboy II is impeccable but at the same time Abe, Hellboy and the various creatures and monsters truly inhabit their characters and come across as believable and authentic and this is no mean considering just how bizarre so many of them are.

There are some amazing stand-out scenes including the Troll Market and the Golden Army sequence at the end, at the same time, these are only as powerful as the plot and characters which carry the film along.

The fact that none of the characters are truly good or evil gives the film a truly nuanced texture, even Prince Nuada who has killed his own father to wage war against the humans, has done so after he has seen the damage mankind has done to the world and it is hard not to feel shamed by his criticism. This is thought provoking fantasy cinema at its very best.

The extras in this package are quite superb including various audio commentaries, an introduction by Guillermo del Toro, comics, storyboards, featurettes, documentaries and more.

There are various releases of the film including a single DVD edition, a special and collectors edition and the highly recommended Blu Ray release (2 DVD).



The Hive
R1 DVD
Genius Entertainment
2008



A fascinating genre within Science Fiction has been the exploration of man versus animals and insects. The fear of atomic war and radiation triggered the first wave of such films in the Fifties and the sheer diversity of these films can be bewildering. From giant ants to Godzilla, mutant creatures to gorillas gone wild, they have all become part of the history of the genre. There are so many films which can fit into this genre from Godzilla and all its derivatives to The Fly, Eight Legged Freaks, Slither and more, even Jaws fit into here at a stretch. That quintessential tale of Moby Dick in many ways is just as much about an animal and its memories of being hunting as about human obsession.

With the development in ecological awareness and man's destructive effect on the environment new variations developed as benign species "fought back" or worse, scientific solutions turned against man and created hybrids or gave animals (and insects) the ability to behave in new ways. Genius Entertainment has created a series exploring these movies called Maneater. This is the ninth in the series.

They are interesting explorations of various themes within the genre made on limited budgets with varying degrees of success. The Hive has an intriguing premise and an excellent plot

though it is let down somewhat by CGI which was obviously made on a budget. Being fair, this is one of the major problems with Science Fiction, how can you make a film which has some 200,000,000 flesh eating ants without very costly special effects? If you overlook its limitations in this department however, the Hive is excellent entertainment.

Horace Lennart runs Thorax Industries, a high tech solution to insect extermination problems.

This is not a small scale business; it works with countries around the world dealing with plague level ant and insect infestations. For a number of years they have battled against animals in an unnamed pacific country using a special formula Lennart has developed as well as fire throwers and plasma guns. However, each time the ants return they seem more organized and more aggressive, as the film opens they eat a woman and her child ! The ants are not only destroying towns but consuming their occupants.

As the Thorax team sets out to destroy the new infestation they find it is the biggest so far and that the ants seem to be developing signs of intelligence. They have strategies for attack and seem to be prepared for the methods Thorax have used in the past. Lennart calls in an old girlfriend entomologist Claire Dubois who has a theory about ant intelligence which has been ridiculed by the scientific community but now it seems rather pertinent.

But what is the catalyst for the massive increase in their intelligence, is the formula Lennart using really benign or is there something else manipulating the ants ?



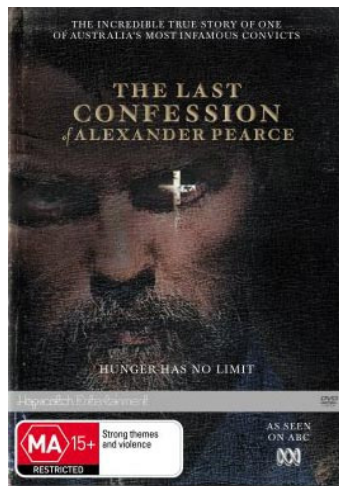
Hungry ants make mincemeat of locals !

The Hive is an intriguing and entertaining tale; it has some fascinating ideas and lots of "ant huntin" action scenes. It is fair to say some of the ways the ants develop including creating an artificial ant computer and a giant ant from millions of worker ants stretches credibility to breaking point. The ending which includes a flying saucer seems to come out of the blue without much justification.

However, that is what Science Fiction is for, to explore new territories, and for all its limitations in terms of CGI and obscure plot turns, it is loads of fun. In many ways it is one of those films which is some damn bad that it ends up being rather good.

**The Last
Confession of
Alexander Pearce
Hopscotch 2008
R4 DVD**

The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce is a historical re-enactment of a very dark chapter in Australian and Irish history.



While it could have easily been sensationalized, instead it has been carefully directed to highlight the shocking conditions that existed in the Australian penal colonies of the period. Rather than showing Pearce as a monster, it shows him as a product of a system that literally turned him savage.

Alexander Pearce was an Irish farm labourer who was convicted of theft and shipped to what was then the Van Diemen's land penal colony. After repeated thefts while in the Van Diemen's penal colony, he is sent to the notorious Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour.

Sarah Island was considered the most isolated prison in the world; it did not require bars or walls as it was bordered by oceans and rainforest. However, Pearce was so brutalized that he decided he had nothing more to lose and escape with some seven other prisoners.

The eight-man escape party was led by the volatile and unstable English sailor named Robert Greenhill, believing that another settlement is just "over the hill" they begin a trek



**Alexander Pearce driven to murder,
cannibalism and madness by the appalling
violence of the penal system.**

which soon becomes a disaster. Starving and suffering from the elements, they resorted to cannibalism. Slowly, one by one, the whole party, except Pearce is eaten, Pearce makes it to Jericho but when brought to trial nobody believes his story.

The authorities simply cannot accept that anyone could have made it across the wilderness, especially considering it is a three months journey. Pearce is returned to Sarah Island. Here he is mercilessly whipped and tortured, reduced to a near animal state, he escapes with a younger man, Cox. However, when he finds Cox cannot swim and hence he cannot make good his escape, he kills and eats Cox and is captured, put on trial and found guilty of murder and cannibalism.

The power of this film is its authenticity. Based on original transcripts of Pearce's confession, it is a stinging indictment of the violence of the penal system of the period. It is a powerful film which juxtaposes the beauty of the Australian landscape with the sheer cruelty of the penal system and those who have been brutalized by it.

The acting is universally impressive and from the moment the film begins you get a real sense you are part of the original events. The re-creation of the buildings of the period cannot be faulted and the music and cinematography create a dark and uncomfortable ambience.

While the film makes no excuses for the barbarity and violence of Pearce and his fellow prisoners, nor for their cannibalism, it does not seek to sensationalize it either, but works to show it in the context of the penal system of the period and to the way in which the Irish were demonized by the English and treated accordingly.

I think the most poignant comment made in the film comes when Pearce is explaining to his confessor what occurred and states "No man can tell what he will do when driven by hunger".

It is a very true observation which relates as much to the Irish sent to Australia for stealing a loaf of bread to Pearce's cannibalism. In a more humane system, perhaps much of the whole cycle of violence and suffering could have been avoided.

Librarian 3 Curse of the Judas Chalice Beyond Entertainment R4 DVD

The Librarian series is a bit like a cross between Indiana Jones and National Treasure. It could have easily taken itself too seriously and become droll and clichéd, however, Jonathan Drakes had taken Marco Schnabel's script and created a witty, fun and at time deliberately outrageous spin on the adventure genre. Originally made for cable TV the Librarian proved so successful that various sequels have been made, this one focuses on the Judas Chalice. The series plays on the myths and legends regarding secret maps and occult treasures, it is packed with every conceivable reference to strange and esoteric tales. Anyone who has read occult, new age or related books will find themselves amused by the constant witty use of these "kooky" beliefs to form the backdrop of the film.



Noah Whyle as nerdy yet suave Librarian

The whole idea of a "Librarian" as a secret adventurer protecting mankind from evil while guarding the world's greatest library is eccentric and effective. It seems that under the Metropolitan Library of New York is a giant secret complex where the world's greatest treasures are stored, from UFO's to H.G Well's Time Machine, from Noah's Ark to the Ark of the Covenant. It is controlled by Judson (who may or may not be its original 2000 year old founder) and his offsider and accountant Charlene. Flynn is the Librarian and after protecting the world from thirty five forms of evil in many different missions and having his girlfriend dump him is ready to have a meltdown. He is offered some time off and cannot wait to take it.

He spends time relaxing at home, reading, exploring card games and generally doing very little. Then he has a rather sexy dream of a woman in New Orleans and so decides to go away on vacation. Of course, nothing is ever as easy as it seems for Flynn. He soon finds that his dream lover is a 400 year old vampire who is guarding a medallion which gives the location of the Judas Chalice. She, however, is a "nice" vampire who does not bite but lives off frozen blood packs. However, the ex head of the KGB believes Russia has fallen to anarchism and chaos and hence is after the Chalice too. His aim is to resurrect Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) to bring about the resurrection of Russian aristocracy once and for all and then with an army of the dead bring the world under Russian domination.

If this sounds totally B grade, perhaps it is, but surprisingly it works exceptionally well. This was clearly made for television (the ad breaks give it away), but the sets and special effects are surprisingly impressive and in many ways their "cult" character adds to the humour of the film which is backed by a very witty and amusing plot filled with great dialogue.

Noah Wyle as the Librarian is excellent, suave yet geeky, nerdy yet passionate; he plays his roll to perfection. One thing that I especially noted with the Curse of the Judas Chalice was the great music. Jonathan Frakes loves Blues and Jazz and it shows in this film, it is packed with great sounds from Blues and Jazz tracks to Seventies riffs, this focus on the soundscape of the film adds an extra texture not found often in a made for TV production.

The Librarian 3 has been released by Beyond Entertainment in DVD and Blu Ray formats.

**Lost Boys 2
The Tribe
Uncut Version
Warner Bros
R4 DVD**

The 1987 cult classic "The Lost Boys" had it all, a quirky Eighties feel, strange haircuts, teen aghast, homo-erotic subtexts, awesome cinematography and a classy vampire plot, never mind that it launched the two Corey's to fame. It has taken some twenty years for a sequel to hit the big screen and the results have the fans divided.

While it features what seems to be a rather surgically remodelled Corey Feldman, beyond that the film has little in common with the original save in name.

The story follows the adventures of brother and sister (Tad Hilgenbrink and Autumn Reeser), good looking yes, dumb as batshit, definitely. Their parents have died and they have returned to their hometown to rebuild their lives. It seems Chris had a breakdown when his parents died and ruined his surfing career by going feral and



hence in an attempt to let off steam they decide to get down and party.

In their search for a goodtime they meet a group of trendy party animals who end up being vampires. The lead vampire Shane seduces Nicole and since not even brotherly over protection can save her, Chris, using the logic of fight fire with fire, decides to become a vampire to fight the vampires.

Under the tutelage of Edgar Frog (Cory Feldman resurrected and looking more frightening than most of the vampires), surf board shaper and vampire hunter, he faces off against The Tribe to save his sister.

In many ways it is unfair to compare this to the original film, Lost Boys. Cult classics occur by accident and not by design and Joel Schumacher's uniquely strange original is a hard act to follow. It brought together a unique range of themes which came together in Eighties cinema and it is unlikely a filmmaker could do so again in 2008.

On the plus side The Tribe has a great sense of humour, an excellent music track and the action has certainly been brought up to date. The uncut version packs a punch with some great killings and lots of solid horror.

At the same time, it lacks the subtlety of the original, you know from the outset who the vampire leader is and this reduces much of the suspense. The original film played off the unknown identity of the master vampire and even when you finally suspected who he was you realized he had infiltrated the family at the centre of the drama. This added a very significant texture to the original plot not found in the sequel.

Lost Boys 2 The Tribe updates the Eighties look to a sort of post modern Goth feel with some nihilistic twists – I think it is especially fun that the pack like to disembowel and stab each other for kicks. Since they can't die, what the hell ? Why not move practical jokes to a new level ?

Lost Boys 2 The Tribe is a fun romp though teen vampire territory, while it certainly isn't a shade on the original, it still keeps the attention with lots of action, good special effects and a rocking sound track. This is horror fantasy without a lot of depth, but it is fun for what it is.



The New Vampire Look of Lost Boys II

**Patrick
R4 DVD
Umbrella
Entertainment**

In room 15 of the mysterious Roget clinic is a young comatose patient named Patrick. His doctor (Robert Helpmann) thinks he's nothing more than 170 pounds of limp meat hanging off a comatose brain but is restrained from turning off the machine. However, a young nurse Kathy thinks that there is more to Patrick than meets the eye.

It seems that since Patrick has lost consciousness, he has gained psychic powers including telekinesis (the ability to move and influence things at a distance) and he begins to influence, perhaps even control, those around him. His doctor performs unusual experiments on his patient and seems to be in a state of emotional co-dependence – a truly quirky relationship indeed with Helpmann as his campy best. Things go from bad to worse when Patrick falls in love with Kathy and when he (quite obviously) cannot consummate his desire becomes obsessive and then enraged...

Made in 1978 Patrick was immediate cult film success even though it seemed to be first appreciated internationally. It was nominated for Best Film at the 1978 AFI Awards and was the winner of the Best Director prize at the prestigious Sitges Fantasy Film Festival in Spain. Patrick has continued to attract a cult following. It is one of the more innovative Ozploitation titles

Patrick and his constantly unnerving gaze !



Patrick's Doctor cops a blow !

celebrated in highly successful 2008 documentary on Australian cult cinema "Not Quite Hollywood". It is packed with suspense, horror and some quite astounding shocks. One of the things which made Patrick so successful was the look of the film. There are some truly unnerving set pieces which have entered the history of cinema as great cult film moments including the momentous climatic death leap Patrick makes from his bed.

A constant mood is created throughout the film by an eye for detail, emphasis is placed on Patrick's gaze and his unblinking eyes and this creates an eerie and uncomfortable feel. There is also a nice reoccurring motif about electricity which, of course, has major consequences later when Patrick starts to use his skills in a more direct manner than just influencing those around him.

In many ways Patrick anticipated such later psychic thrillers as Scanners and is still a very impressive cult horror film with a lot to offer. While many attempts were made to make knock off sequels (an Italian one comes to mind), nothing compares to the original.

While Patrick has been available on DVD in the past, this really is the definitive edition featuring a new high quality anamorphic transfer and a collection of exclusive special features including "A coffee break with Antony I. Ginnane" - an all-new featurette on the making of Patrick, a rare archival on-set interview with Director Richard Franklin, audio commentary with Director Richard Franklin, an excerpt from dubbed US version. Other features include "The Man Who Wasn't There" – a PDF file of the unproduced Patrick sequel treatment, original Australian and US trailers, a stills and poster gallery, Ginnane trailer reel and more Umbrella Ozploitation trailers.

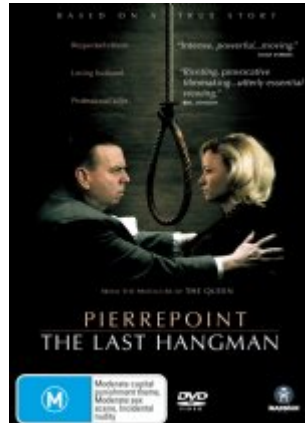
**Pierrepoint:
The Last Hangman
R4 DVD
Madman 2008**

The film opens as Albert Pierrepoint is courting his girl Annie, he is a grocery delivery man and makes a decent living but not enough to really achieve what he wants. He decides to follow his father before him and apply to become an executioner. After attending a training course and being sworn to secrecy, Albert and another executioner are given their "first" run, Albert shows his professionalism under pressure and is given the position. He lives a double life; he does not tell his friends or his wife what he does when he travels away.

He becomes the most respected executioner in the country, working with diligence and care; he is able to undertake his job diligently and efficiently. He takes pride in carefully noting their height, weight and build so they are killed quickly and without suffering and goes as far as to personally prepare each body after the execution.

However, things change when he is asked to travel to Germany and work as England's hangman, the sheer number of executions (over 13 a day) demands the use of a double gallows and takes a toll on his health. When he returns he finds his anonymity has been compromised and he is now a celebrated national hero for execut-

**Pierrepoint carefully preparing a Prisoner
for Hanging**



ing the Nazi war criminals. With the money he has made from his work he opens a pub with his wife and continues his work.

However, when the public starts to turn against capital punishment and when he must hang his best friend for killing his girlfriend (in a truly harrowing scene), he begins to fray at the edges. As his wife sees the effect it is having on her husband, she encourages him to resign after he has completed some 608 executions.

This is a superbly made film - sombre, reflective and melancholy. Timothy Spall as Pierrepoint is eminently believable and offers a truly authentic performance. Spall helps us understand Pierrepoint's perfectionism, dedication to his job and wish to be the very best as matched by his desire to treat the prisoners as human beings. The performance by Juliet Stevenson as his wife is nuanced and powerful, she is both a sensitive and caring wife, understanding the toll her husband's work is taking on him, yet also a social climber. Throughout the film you notice the slow transformation of her clothing from everyday wear to expensive dresses, pearls and a fur coat, she is certainly enjoying the money from his work while refusing him the right to even discuss it.

For me the most confronting sequence was when Tish, his best friend, becomes entangled in an affair with a married woman. He even buys her a diamond ring but is rejected and he begins to stalk her. One night he follows her to a motel and strangles her in a moment of insane jealousy. Pierrepoint has no idea of Tish's real name since they were "pub" buddies and he only knew him by his nickname. When he arrives at his next execution it is his friend he must hang, in a moving scene he acknowledges his friend, calms him and hangs him. This is one of the more potent scenes in a film I have seen for quite a while.

There is so much in Pierrepoint, it explores friendship, love, the work ethic and above all the human cost of capital punishment on those who are called to carry out the task.

This is a film which could have so easily been sensationalized, it avoids focusing too much on the executions themselves and even on the crimes which lead to them. This is a film about Albert Pierrepoint and the human side of capital punishment and it is truly a film which will stay with you for quite a while.

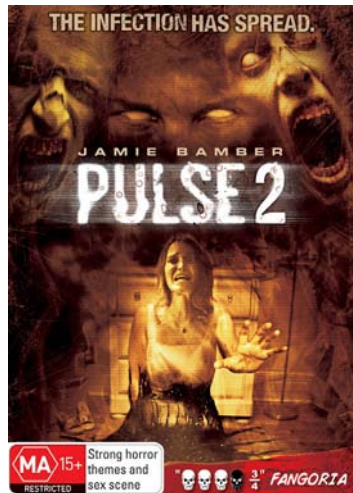
Pulse 2
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

The Japanese Film Kairo (Pulse) formed the inspiration for the US adaptation also called Pulse which was well received in 2006. Pulse 2 continues the story and offers a nightmarish journey into a strange and frightening possible future for humanity. The apocalypse, it seems, does not come from global warming or warfare, nor even from religious extremism and terrorism but from the world of the dead.

It seems that when people die they do not end up in a beatific paradise or a torturous hell, but a dimension of emptiness and nothingness, a realm of “hungry ghosts” (traditional to much eastern spirituality). They live in a perpetual state of desire wishing to return to the realm of the living. Due to a technological disaster a gate has been opened between this world and the next and our world is invaded by the dead. The portals for their intrusion can be any form of technology - computers, televisions, LCD screens, PDAS and cell phones.

As soon as the living are infected they begin to experience intense mental suffering and slowing become covered by what looks like blood poisoning. If they do not commit suicide (and most do using whatever means available), they disintegrate into clouds of black dust and then be-

Michelle becomes a “hungry ghost” in Pulse 2



come part of the world of the dead. Pulse II is an unusual film; it has a dreamlike quality, filled with fleeting images and a moody ambient soundtrack. The original story is not retold, but inferred as we move through the film. It opens as Michelle finds her apartment covered in dark dust and her daughter Justine is missing.

At first it seems the daughter has been taken by her father or worse has been killed. Michelle cannot remember what occurred and seems confused and disoriented. As the story unfolds we realize it is not Justine who is dead but Michelle and she seems to have vengeance on her mind.

Stephen, Michelle's ex husband has taken Justine to the safety of his cabin in the woods in some sort of gated community gated by trigger happy locals. Soon his truly gormless city living girlfriend arrives. As they settle for the night, his computer turns on and before he knows what has happened Michelle has travelled through the wireless network, invaded his cabin and killed his good for nothing girlfriend. (Well, that is not any great loss really). Stephen and Justine flee into the night.

As his girlfriend slowly becomes infected, one of the “guardians” of the community pays her a visit. Finding her naked and inviting, he decides to enjoy the ride and takes advantage of her “hospitality” as she slowly decays into black goo, quite a scene to say the least !

Stephen and Justine now must try and find somewhere safe to survive far beyond any technology (including the reach of cell phones) with Michelle very much on their trail and only a roll of “red tape” for protection, any error could mean disaster for both of them.

Pulse 2 is a very effective and haunting film; it creates a sense of eeriness throughout with creative filming and the ghosts looking like video or TV images, which is, of course, significant since they are transmitting themselves via various forms of technology.

There are some truly powerful moments and the use of special effects is innovative rather than overdone. Violence and gore is kept to a minimum but when it is used, it is very effective. The ending is unexpected and seems to be setting up for a sequel.

**Robot Chicken:
Star Wars
Madman Ent
R4 DVD**

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Robot Chicken is a sketch-based comedy show currently airing on the Comedy Channel's Adult Swim section on pay TV. It is now up to its fourth season, which started in December 2008.

It is the creation of Matthew Senreich and Seth Green, and the various sketches are produced by the companies shown above. They use stop-motion animation and claymation effects, and feature action figures, toys and dolls. Figures from TV shows are popular, especially as it allows the team to parody some really dreadful shows that fully deserve this treatment. At the outset I must warn you that the shows are gross, disgusting, vulgar feasts of splatter, swearing and sex.

There is absolutely no subtlety in their humour. If you are a fan of the British style of laid back comedy, you are not going to enjoy these shows at all. If, however, shows that look like a crudely made splatter movie are your style, you will certainly enjoy the series. It is most definitely an American style, though, and it won't appeal to everyone.

Still from Robot Chicken: Star Wars



A long, long time ago in a galaxy not far enough away

If you find the show itself a little too gross, try the Star Wars spoof. A lot of clips from this episode have been released on the Internet. Look for the clip of Darth Vader explaining to the Emperor that the Death Star has been destroyed, to get an idea of the content. "I thought my Dark Lord of the Sith could protect an exhaust port only two metres across". "What the hell is an Aluminium Falcon?". The sketch of George W Bush discovering that he has the Force is disturbing. Abraham Lincoln's very brief appearance as Obi-Wan is even more so. At least we get to see Jar Jar spaced through the airlock. The chicken chorus clucking the Star Wars theme at the end is not to be missed. The Star Wars episode was nominated for an Emmy award in 2008.

I particularly liked the Transformers sketches. One clearly shows the dangers of transforming into a car where your girlfriend and best friend can have sex and leave stains on your leather seats, where the car will be stripped and vandalized (leaving you legless when you transform back) and the final indignity of being towed away.

Famous figures get a regular serve of ridicule, too (in George W Bush's case, a king size serve). Even Arnold Schwarzenegger is not too sacred to be featured. Dinosaurs, aliens, mad scientists, loveable old grannies – they are all there. In spite of this, leading personalities seem to be lining up to get a guest appearance on the show. Robot Chicken has achieved the ultimate accolade of becoming a Cult Show.

There is a wide range of extras in the form of outtakes, gags, alternative audio, commentary on the episodes, and behind the scenes.

The shows have an MA 15+ rating in Australia. The warning sticker really sums it up – "Strong themes, strong sexual references, strong drug references, strong animated violence, moderate coarse language, and frequent crude humour".

Yep, that's Robot Chicken all right.

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Cinematic Titanic Santa Claus Conquers the Martians R0 NTSC DVD

Cinematic Titanic is the new feature-length movie riffing show from the creator and original cast of Mystery Science Theater 3000. Like MST3K, the show was created by Joel Hodgson and features the same team that first brought the Peabody award winning cult-classic series to life: Trace Beaulieu (Crow, Dr. Forrester), J. Elvis Weinstein (Tom Servo, Dr. Erhardt), Frank Conniff (TV's Frank), and Mary Jo Pehl (Pearl Forrester). Cinematic Titanic continues the tradition of riffing on 'the unfathomable', 'the horribly great', and the just plain 'cheesy' movies from the past.

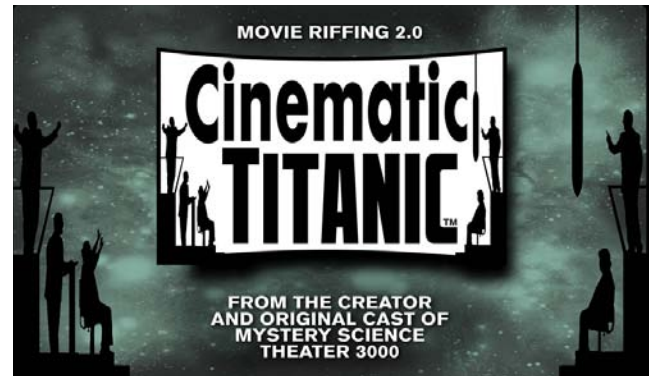
Founded in late 2007, Cinematic Titanic is an artist funded, owned, and operated venture. With a combination of new shows on DVD every 6-8 weeks and an ever-growing schedule of live shows, the crew hopes to reconnect with old fans around the world as well as bringing new fans to the comedy art form they first brought to Television 20 years ago.

Santa Claus Conquers the Martians is a film that just dares to be ridiculed. Inane, stupid and cheesy – it is the ultimate piece of mind rotting family entertainment.

While it would be fair to say that the original was without much redeeming value, even if you were very drunk, the Cinematic Titanic version takes the film and twists it into something that is humorous and entertaining.

Riffing is a strange comedy art and can be uneven, the humour only really works if the movie provides the "handles" to hang the joke, accordingly a film such as this while fun and witty can drag a little in places. I certainly enjoyed the wit and snide humour but wasn't sure it was enough to sustain me right through the film.

There were periods when the team really got into their stride and the jokes flowed quick and fast, at other times it seemed rather strained.



The children of Mars are depressed, and nothing on the red planet seems to be able to cheer them up. They are forced to grow up very young and constantly study; they have no toys and spend their spare time watching earth TV.

As the parents of Mars become concerned, King Kimar consults an 800 year old oracle who pinpoints the problem – it is Christmas and Martian kids don't get no toys !

The solution: kidnap Santa Claus from Earth and bring him to their planet to make toys for their listless little green kids.

As they land on earth, two earth children give them the location of Santa Claus' lair in the North Pole and end up being kidnapped along with Santa himself. Along the way King Kimar must battle against an evil adversary who wants to keep Mars as a planet of war and Dropo, the comedy interest in the movie, whose D grade comedy slapstick is enough to drive any viewer certifiably insane. This is not to mention a large polar bear who looks like a plush toy and a robotic warrior who Santa Claus charms into being a toy !

Of course (sadly) all turns out well with Santa and the kids back on earth and Mars with its own Santa, who it is I won't tell as I wouldn't want to destroy the intriguing and action packed climax when the baddies are trashed and Christmas prevails !

Santa Claus Conquers the Martians has a woe-ful plot, dreadful special effects and acting so bad you will cringe. It is for this reason that Cinematic Titanic decided to make the most of this treasure and offer it as the ultimate Xmas movie riffed title.

Cinematic Titanic
Web: <http://www.cinematictitanic.com>

Shuttle **All Interactive** **R4 DVD**

Shuttle is an unusual thriller which combines a high level of violence with suspense and an intriguing plot. The central premise centres around “white slavery” and certainly is a dark and visceral viewing experience.



Mel (Peyton List) and Jules (Cameron Goodman) are returning from a holiday but having chosen a cheap fare find themselves with missing luggage and locked outside the transit lounge at the airport. They hitch up with a couple of guys and look for a shuttle service.

They are just about to board an official service when another shuttle comes along and offers the trip at half price. There is an older looking man in the shuttle and all seems legit, so off they go for the journey. The driver (he is never named), takes them the long way round with stories of the highway being repaired. They all talk among themselves, flirting and joking until they realize something is very wrong. By now, however, they are in the middle of nowhere and things start to go from bad to worse.

The strongest of the young men has his fingers cut off when changing a wheel as the van

One of the many attempts to kill or main the driver.



“accidentally” drops and step by step the driver takes control of the passengers, forcing them to handover credit cards, withdraw money and valuables. However, it seems money is not his prime concern.

As they drive into nowhere, he forces one of the girls to purchase a range of items at a store and this is one of the more stupid scenes. She not only does what she is told but communicates via hand gestures to the store camera in an attempt to get help, which of course achieves little. There are a number of these rather silly plot twists which take away from what is an extremely powerful movie with a harrowing conclusion.

The movie continues with a range of interesting twists and turns and certainly the ongoing battle between Mel and the driver are impressive and painful. However, in the end it becomes a little exhausting; Mel constantly misses the mark, makes the wrong stab and just doesn't take control when both she and her friend's life are at risk. When confronted clearly with a life in white slavery, she still doesn't make the cut, she has the gun, but somehow misses ! At the same time, the driver seems to border on superhuman, at times he seems like “Freddy Krueger” or “Jason” – no matter what is done to him he won't stay down and this stretches the credibility of the film to breaking point.

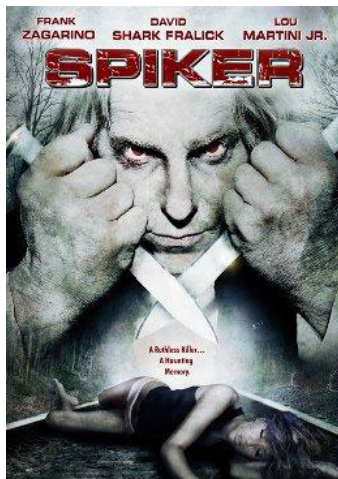
The final scenes are certainly harrowing and while you would expect a final vengeful killing as the driver is destroyed and the final girl survives, this is not to be. She is locked in a box with the goods she has bought at the store and sent off into white slavery, on the kitty litter she must use as a toilet is a photo of naked woman beaten and bruised who are obviously sex slaves. Certainly a potent image.

Shuttle is uneven and at times lacks believability; the acting is generally good with some intriguing roles such as the weak family man who turns out to be an accomplice.

On the whole, Shuttle is suspenseful and action packed. There is not a moment when you are not on the edge of your seat and while the plot may leave a little to be desired in parts, it is certainly an effective work of cinema which tries to create a story which is a bit different from the current run of the mill suspense films.

Spiker
MTI 2008
R1 DVD

Spiker is a rather innovative slasher film which received accolades at The New York City Horror Film Festival. While it has all the elements of a traditional slasher film from dumb teenagers, semi nude girls and lots of slaughter using a wide variety of weapons from axes to spikes, it moves beyond the well worn path and includes some intriguing turns including a fascinating ghost story along the way.



The story centres on Spiker, a serial killer who has killed some twenty seven people by spiking them with railway spikes. The method of killing alone helps makes this film stand out – it is brutal and visceral. Add to this that the killer is huge, bulky, albino with pink eyes and you have a truly terrifying character. While being transported to a psychiatric institution via ferry Spiker either suffers a fit or fakes one, kills the doctor and some of the police and jumps overboard.

While everyone thinks he is dead, he escapes onshore and returns to the place of his humiliation. Along the way we are treated to some excellent cinematography, the scene where he rises up out of the water before beginning his new killing spree is truly breathtaking and when he walks along the railway line at night smashing the spikes together, you get a real lump in your throat!

It seems Spiker was in love with Elizabeth but when she became pregnant to another man, she was forced to marry him. They decided to meet for a last tryst on the night before her marriage and her journey to Boston but she could not stand losing the man she loved so committed suicide by throwing herself in front of a train. This sent Spiker off the "rails" and he began to kill indiscriminately, burying bodies along the railway tracks.

While I have some qualms about the film in terms of its sometimes wooden acting, this is more than countered by an interesting plot, a bizarre and unusual killer and lots of suspense and terror.

This is a highly successful slasher moving the genre in new directions with the added dimension of a ghost story and a fetish for railway spikes.

Web: <http://www.mtivideo.com>

Til Death Do Us Part
BCI/Navarre
Corporation
R1 DVD

Til Death Do Us Part (also known in UK, Canada and Australia as Love You to Death) is a television series which debuted on Court TV in America during March 2007. The first season of 13 episodes has been released in the US by BCI/Navarre Corporation on DVD, it is presented on 3 DVDs in a nice slipcase with a darkly amusing insert booklet.



The series is narrated and hosted by cult film director John Waters, who plays "The Groom Reaper." He provides a witty, sometimes vindictive and always insightful introduction to each 30 minute episode as well as various comments throughout the episode. He also provides the wrap up at the end and warns the viewer that it may be their marriage he will report on next. In the TV series viewers could send text messages to guess the killer and win prizes.

The DVD series includes extra introductions by Waters and is an absolute scream. It is somewhat like the Twilight Zone or even Tales from the Crypt except it focuses on tales of love gone bad rather than strange yarns. The re-enactments are well done with regularly bloody murders.

Til Death Do Us Part is certainly made as humorous entertainment with over the top character acting, deliberately exaggerated dialogue and John Water's misanthropic reflections on life, love and death. Each story is, however, based on a real event and hence has quite some bite, including all forms of infidelity and, of course, all manner of murder.

If you ever have doubts about the sanctity of marriage, Til Death Do Us Part will confirm your opinion.

Tortured **All Interactive** **R4 DVD**

Tortured is quite an amazing film, filled with intrigue, suspense and a psychological intensity you will not forget. With a title like "Tortured" you may worry you are in for a horror experience filled with unnecessary gut wrenching violence, however this is actually a surprisingly thought provoking film.



Certainly, the central nexus of the tale is the torture of a suspect to extract information and while this has a certain level of brutality, compared to what is shown in many films today the violence is moderate and a lot is implied. The focus is really on the psychological aspects of the interaction between the torturer and the tortured.

Cole Hauser is FBI Agent Kevin Cole, he is the son of a powerful bureau chief (James Cromwell). Following in his father's footsteps he wants to make it his own way and has already had a stint in Afghanistan when he enters the FBI covert operations division.

His task is to infiltrate America's most dangerous crime syndicate which is lead by "Ziggy", a man who has been in hiding for many years. Other agents who have tried to infiltrate the organization have not made it passed first base and most have ended up tortured and killed.

Cole Hauser as Kevin Cole in Tortured



To even get to Ziggy is a major achievement. Cole is beaten and tortured to prove his metal and then given his first task. He is assigned to use all his skills on syndicate accountant Archie Green (Laurence Fishburne), who is accused of stealing ten million dollars from Ziggy.

For seven days he tortures Green, unleashing all manner of techniques including brutally removing all his nails. Along the way Cole becomes more and more disturbed by what he is doing on behalf of the FBI.

The film moves back through the investigation and shows the cost in human life for him to get to where he now is and the moral choices Cole has made in the investigation, many which have cost human lives.

The pressures of the investigation cost him his girlfriend and his is more than disturbed to find that his father was involved in an earlier infiltration of Ziggy's syndicate which ended in the death of Ziggy's only daughter.

It is at this stage that the film really moves into quite a fascinating climax. We realize that Archie Green is already dead and that Ziggy is the one being tortured.

He has spent years setting up this trap to kill Cole in retribution for the death of his daughter. He has been willing to undergo seven days of torture just to manipulate a situation where he can face off against Cole and his father.

While tortured is an admirable and impressive detective tale, it is actually far more. It is a study of how torture compromises the perpetrator as well as the victim. There is a superb moment when Cole tells Ziggy he is pleased that he tortured him and Ziggy responds "no, I tortured you".

This is the essence of this film that by being driven to acts of extreme inhumanity we become dehumanized ourselves.

Of course, this has lots of relevance today in the current political climate and through a fictional story, brings the debate about torture post 9/11 into view.

Is torture ever justified ? Even if the victims are criminals and murderers, what effect does it have on the perpetrator/investigator who undertakes it and more importantly does it diminish the legal institutions which allow it ? This is a fascinating film, thought provoking, intelligent, brilliantly acted and presents a fascinating glimpse of what can happen in a criminal investigation when the end becomes the justification for the means.

**Wanted:
Uncut Edition
Universal
R4 DVD**

Wanted is an adaptation of Mark Millar's graphic novel and offers a surreal, frenzied action packed journey into secret societies, assassinations and political intrigue, as well as exploring the angst of a downtrodden office nerd !

Wesley Gibson is not sure who he is. His father left when he was a baby and he finds everyday life dreary and unsatisfying. His girlfriend is having an affair with his best friend, his manager treats him with contempt and he uses anti anxiety pills to get through the day. Somehow he makes it through each day yet feels numb. However, one day all of that changes, dramatically !

Morgan Freeman as Sloan in Wanted



When he is paying for his pills at a chemist, Fox (Angelina Jolie) throws him to the ground to protect him from a would-be assassin.

Soon he is part of a frenzied cat and mouse game through the city, when he awakens he is at the headquarters of a very strange organisation. Known as The Fraternity, they are a mystical order of assassins which developed out of a special esoteric craft known as "weaving". It seems they are able to weave a special fabric in which is encoded the names of those whose destiny "will disrupt the flow of history".

From this knowledge they undertake precision assassinations and I mean precision. They all have special abilities, Wesley has the ability to quicken his heart beat and shoot around corners. They convince him that his father has been killed by a rogue Fraternity member and then offer him assassination training. The training is brutal and violent and only because they have a special "healing bath" are the injuries temporal. He is trained in fists, knives and of course, guns !

After various assassinations including an amazing on-road shot through a sun roof into a speeding car and a shot into an office with from the top of a speeding train, Wesley is convinced of the upright nature of the Fraternity.

Sloan (played impeccably by Morgan Freeman) as a sort of substitute father figure obviously helps Wesley feel at home. However, as he confronts his arch adversary, he finds that not only is his father not dead, but the man he has just killed is his real father. Fox follows secret instructions from Sloan and attempts to kill Wesley but he escapes.

It seems Sloan used their fraternal bond to get Wesley's father out of the way.

Sloan had been setting up fake names in the textile to get paid assassinations undertaken by the Fraternities members and living handsomely off the proceeds and Wesley's father found out and hence had to be removed.

Wesley now is set on revenge and with the help of a truck load of exploding rats (a scene not seen in a movie before and maybe never again !), a showdown entails.

This is wild, escapist fantasy, packed with mysticism, assassinations and truly startling special effects. From the sheer brutality of Wesley's training to the Fraternity's ability to bend the trajectory of bullets, this is the stuff of dreams (and perhaps nightmares).

It is a strange film which combines a rather post modern contempt for the world (bordering on misanthropy) expressed through Wesley's running commentary with a wild and abandoned indulgence in violence.

At times the film seems to revel in all manner of violence from the beltings Wesley receives during his training to the visceral creativity shown in the assassinations.

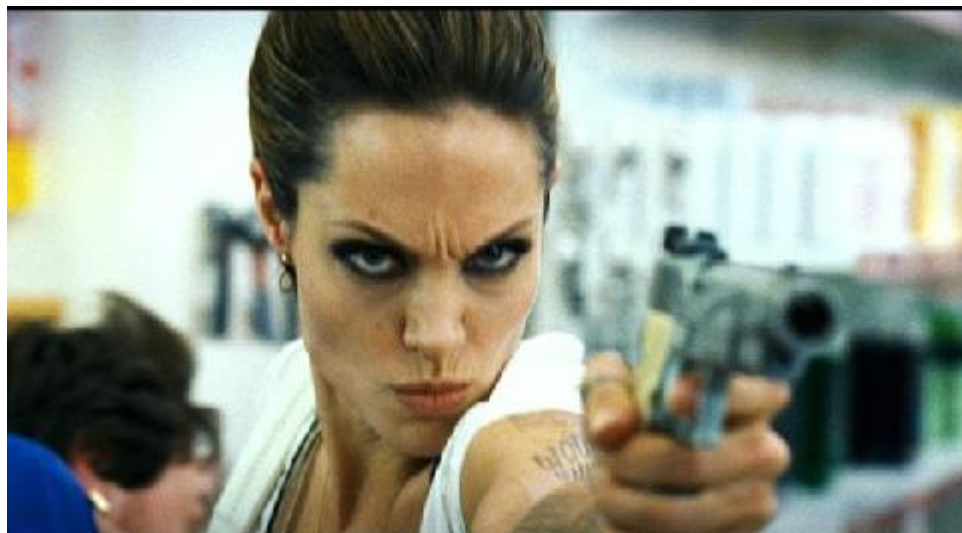
The acting is superb with Angela Jolie as a rather beautiful tattooed assassin, Morgan Freeman as a very convincing Puppet Master of the Fraternity and a minor appearance by Terrance Stamp as a representative of Wesley's Father. Wesley offers a superb performance transforming from an anxiety ridden office nerd to an assassin and warrior.

While certainly *Wanted* is carried along with absolutely astounding special effects and action sequences these are equally matched with an unusual plot and solid acting.

Wanted is quite a unique film, it could be best categorized as an assassination fantasy film !

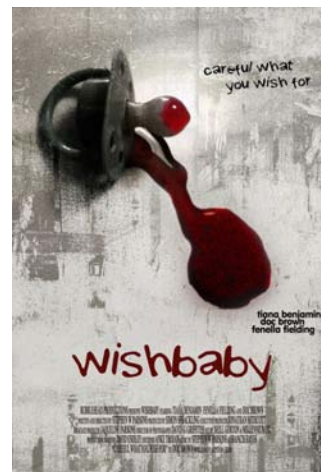
It mixes action, a dark and witty sense of humour with fantasy and lots of violence into an unusual but ultimately rewarding package.

Angelina Jolie as Fox in *Wanted*



Wishbaby Bubblehead Productions 2008

Wishbaby is a superbly made adult fairytale set within a contemporary urban landscape where crime and drugs abound and everyday life is beset with difficulties.



Maxine is a young black teenager who does the best she can. Her mother goes missing for weeks at a time living with various lovers and her brother Colin, a bike courier, has a quickly developing drug problem.

They live in an apartment illegally created inside an office building with very limited amenities. The floor above is an illegal brothel run by a violent Russian which is constantly flooding the building with noise, never mind the constant undesirable visitors.

Maxine is constantly skipping school and social services is after her. The rest of the family are unwilling to help and there is discussion of taking her into care.

The region where Maxine lives is filled with violence and when she sees an eccentric old lady, Eve, being attacked by a street gang, she rescues her. Maxine accompanies Eve home and finds she lives in a very a strange ramshackle old house, the centre of her life is a Wishbaby.

The secret of how to make a Wishbaby was passed to Eve when she was a child by her Governess, a strange and domineering woman with occult powers. Eve decides to pass onto Maxine the secret of the Wishbaby.

After carefully collecting the required items and undertaking various secret rites Maxine is able to transmit her desires and fears into the Wishbaby and it comes alive.



Be Careful What You Wish For !

However, it seems the secret of the Wishbaby was passed to Eve and Eve alone and this unauthorized transmission of knowledge releases the astral shade of her Governess who returns to protect the wisdom of the ancient craft.

The Governess was a stern and disciplined lady and when Eve was a child and asked her to remain with her forever, she took her literally at her word.

She does not take lightly to Eve's sharing of the Wishbaby's secrets nor to Maxine's unruly and undisciplined use of its power. Now she has returned she will guard the Wishbaby's powers with every ounce of her power.

The Cast of Wishbaby- A Very Modern Fairytale..



As Maxine uses the Wishbaby to "remove" the nuisance of her neighbours and to bring her mother back home, she realizes too late that the power of the Wishbaby is not something to be taken lightly. The neighbours are not just silenced but driving to madness and then death and her mother returns but is very different from when she left.

Now Eve has to not only deal with the consequences of her use of the Wishbaby but a zombie like mother who wants it for herself and will do anything to get control of it.

This, of course, is not to mention the Governess who is watching everything that is happening very carefully.

Wishbaby is a fascinating modern fairytale with a razor sharp edge. It is a fascinating mixture of the old pagan myth of "spells gone wrong" and fairies and goblins who fulfil human wishes but not quite as we may wish.

It's portrayal of modern urban life is brutally honest and authentic and this is also helped with an excellent score.

The use of baby noises and children's songs add a constant eerie edge to otherwise normal looking scenes. It is an extremely strange combination, a gritty urban environment filled with modern life, crime and decay overlaid with a fairytale story line and images which seem more suited to a world of myth and legend !

Eve is a superbly eccentric and bizarre old lady and the pagan elements of the Wishbabys creation are nicely handled. The strange rite of naming the doll and then burying it in the garden so it can be reborn as a Wishbaby has a real folkish charm.

The careful development of the characters, an excellent plot and a powerful climax make this a very impressive and indeed moody film.

Bubblehead Productions

Web:
<http://www.wishbaby.com>

EXTREME, GIALLO & HORROR

WORLD CINEMA

13 Game of Death
Eastern Eye
Madman Entertainment 2009

13 Game of Death known as 13 Beloved or 13 game sayawng in Thailand, is a very unusual film based on a comic book by Ekasit Thairat. It is a dark and confronting thriller which is a sort of reality TV Game which pushes the limits of the player step by step, until the final challenge is truly frightening indeed.

At any stage you can loose of the money you have won unless you complete the task required of you, never mind having to deal with the consequences of the actions you have undertaken along the way.

Puchit (Chit for short), played by Krissada Terrence is an average guy. He works as hard as he can, but is not particularly successful. He sends money home to his mum and has a girlfriend who is a small time pop singer.

On this day, however, things go from bad to worse, his car is repossessed, a co-worker encroaches on his territory and steals a big sale and he is sacked from his job. Just as all seems

Another task to complete...



lost he gets a strange phone call...

The caller identifies Chit and clearly knows a lot about him. He advises him that he has been selected to enter a competition in which 100 million baht is up for grabs; entry is only open to a select number of people who have financial and personal problems. Chit is not convinced until the caller recites to Chit his education, career and experiences (including his recent sacking). It also seems the caller is watching him. He is offered a "taste" - kill a fly with a newspaper and win an immediate prize, he does so with a sense of exhilaration as he receives an SMS advising his bank balance has increased.

He is given the terms of the competition, which include not discussing it with anyone else, not trying to find who is controlling the competition and that he must complete all thirteen challenges to win. Each task becomes more perverse than the last - he must eat the fly he has killed, make three children cry, beat up a homeless man for cash and eat a meal of shit.

As you can imagine this is just the beginning. We slowly watch Chit move down the slippery slide of madness as every aspect of his morality is destroyed in his quest for success. It is an interesting and fascinating concept, at what stage would you stop if you have won lots of money and knew you would lose it all if you did not continue?

This is a strange tale of money, morality and



obsession. The complexity of each task increases as each level is completed and a bit like a reality TV show or a computer game gone wrong, the risks get greater and greater.

Along the way we have his girlfriend and the police trying to find out what is going on and Chit trying to win the game before he is arrested. The cinematography is nicely done with the flashback to Chit's abusive childhood also adding a deeper layer to his experiences, he regrets what he is doing but feels compelled to complete each task at whatever cost.

While this is a successful thriller film with an unusual premise, there are some problems. The omniscient nature of the controllers of the game who seem able to see everything seems a little contrived and no attempt is really made to explain how this is possible, in addition some of the special effects seen a little overdone.

13 Game of Death is certainly a different sort of Thai film; it starts with a very grand idea and works to explore it in an innovative and creative way. The plot is intriguing and the character development solid, while I have some misgivings, in the end it is a very successful and suspense filled film which is very different from run of the mill horror cinema.

The Cold Blooded Beast Raro Video All Region DVD

The Cold Blooded Beast, *La Bestia uccide a sangue freddo* also known as *Slaughter Hotel* is an outrageous exploitation slasher from 1971.



The setting is a palatial castle where rich woman with emotional and psychiatric problems go for rehabilitation and relaxation. The clinic is up-market with an individual member of staff assigned to each patient, lots of good wine, food and very personal attention. The patients are offered massages, sports and all manner of luxury as well as therapy.

The patients currently in house range from a nymphomaniac whose desire for her brother is thwarted and hence lusts after any male she meets to a wife with homicidal rage.

There is a young suicidal woman and various others. The doctors and staff are notably strange including Dr. Clay played by Klaus Kinski who seems to have a very special relationship with one of the patients and a nurse who has a rather spirited lesbian affair with the girl in her charge.

The Cold Blooded Beast is explicit in both sex and violence. The nudity and sex borders on the XXX with very clear close-ups of masturbation and lesbian scenes. We are treated to a wide range of erotic content as the masked killer stalks the institution killing with various weapons which happen to be on hand ranging from a scythe and axe to an Iron Maiden ! This combination of sex and violence certainly makes the film an interesting ride, though I am not especially sure it adds a lot to the character development or plot.

There are some twists and turns and at first you are unsure of the identity of the killer as a number of the husbands are possible candidates. However, the film does not build much suspense and while the climax is impressively bloody, as a whole it is not especially successful.

As an exploitation film taking the slasher genre to the next level with graphic nudity and sex, it does what it sets out to do. While non European slashers tend to be coy about adult content, The Cold Blooded Beast takes a truly "European" approach to the subject and is hence a rather entertaining interpretation of the slasher genre, but it seems to do so to the detriment of suspense, plot and character development. That is not to say it is not fun for what it is, but don't expect too much.

Web: <http://www.raro-video.com>

Island of the Fishmen
L'Isola degli uomini
pesce
No Shame Films
R2 DVD

Island of the Fishman is a very strange Italian variation of the themes found in the Island of Dr. Moreau. Made in 1979 it combines a sort of Euro-Trash version of the classic science fiction tale with some Giallo elements thrown in for good measure.

The movie is set in 1891 and a medical transport called The Cayenne is sunk. Left floating in a lifeboat with little food and water are the ship's doctor Claude de Ross, six hardened criminals and one member of the crew. They are inching closer and closer to death until an ocean current crashes the boat into a mysterious island. However, they do not all survive; one of the prisoners is attached by some sort of creature as they scramble onto land.

As they search for water, they die one by one by various nefarious means ranging from man traps to poisoned water and of course by the watery creatures. The only survivors are the doctor and two convicts. When they come across an ancient pagan graveyard they also meet Amanda, a beautiful but strange woman.

She advises them to leave the Island quick smart as the territory belongs to Edmund Rackham, who does not permit strangers on his land. As they have no means of escape, they follow her to Rackham's property and slowly a story of medical experiments, the lost city of Atlantis, fish people and love and betrayal unfolds !

The Fishmen !



The film is filled to the brim with every possible horror cliché from Voodoo to Atlantis, medical experimentation and mad scientists, the vain pursuit of treasure and love that is refused. It is also set on a rather lush island which offers a superb background which is matched by some impressive underwater sequences.

The Fishman are actually fairly well done and the film has enough strange plot changes that it keeps your interest, the soundtrack is superb with lots of Voodoo drums .

L'Isola degli uomini pesce is the original uncut release also known as Island of Mutations. It was released in the US cut and dubbed as Something Waits in the Dark. This release from No Shame includes an English mono track and an Italian Mono and DD 5.1 which has English subtitles.

It is rather a shame that the English track is only in Mono and is dubbed, I would have much preferred the Italian with English subtitles, but for a rare title it is simply good to have it available.

Machine Girl
R1 DVD
Tokyo Shock
(Media
Blasters)

Machine Girl by Noboru Iguchi is quite an experience, Iguchi is well known for both his extreme cinema and for his various adult titles, so if you expect Machine Girl to be wild

entertainment it certainly lives up to your expectations.

Machine Girl is a prime example of extreme Japanese horror entertainment with a high level of violence, gore and dysfunctional family stereotypes, from the Yakuza and Bullying to violent abusive parents and an obsessive need for revenge "we all need to become demons to protect our children" – wow...





Ami “armed” and ready to go !

Ami lives with her younger brother Yu and has taken care of him ever since their parents committed suicide after being accused of murder. They promised their parents they would avoid the use of violence considering the slander against their family name, but find it hard to live in a society where organized crime and school bullying is rampant.

Yu and his friend Takeshi are tormented and bullied by Sho, the son of a local Yakuza boss and after they are forced to hand over large amounts of money are thrown off a building. The police, of course, write it off as suicide but Ami is not convinced. She finds a list of “people I want to kill” in Yu’s diary and decides to investigate. Her first stop is the home of one of Sho’s gang members, Hyoto. His parents are less than helpful, the father is a violent policeman and the mother pathologically devoted to her family. In fury at the “slander” against his son’s reputation Ryota’s father attacks her and her mother covers Ami’s arm in tempura batter and pushes it into the deep fryer !

At every turn she is accused of being a murderer just like her parents were supposed to be and this pushes her over the edge. She returns and kills Hyoto and his mother and confronts the Yakuza family. An onslaught unfolds; however, she is caught and tortured. She is able to escape but has lost an arm and is injured.

Led by visions of Yu, she wanders to the home of Takeshi’s parents. His mother Miki at first blames Ami for the death of her son but soon they band together to get revenge. Her husband, a rather innovative mechanic as well as

the son of a doctor comes in handy. He sews up Ami’s wounds and builds her a machine gun and chain-saw attachment for her stump ! She is now a killing machine primed for revenge and does not plan to take prisoners.

For then on it is battle after battle with nearly constant bloodshed, gore and torture. The way they find the hidden location of the clan by driving nails into the security guards face is especially difficult to watch.

The climactic scene is well developed, with Miki and Ami having to first fight through the families of the people they have killed along the way. They then have to fight against Sho’s father with his Ninja decapitation device and finally Sho’s mother who has a electric bladed ninja bra of steel !

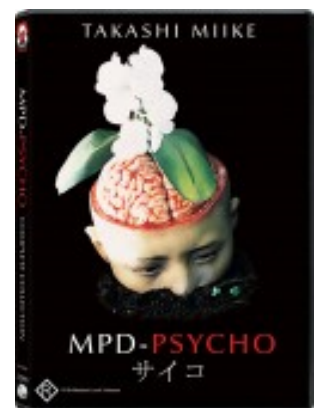
Machine Girl is an outrageous gore fest which offers constant bloodshed from beginning to end. Sure there are some passing themes related to bullying, dysfunctional families and the Yakuza but these don’t get in the way of the sheer ferocity of the film.

This is a gleeful and exuberant splatterfest and should be enjoyed accordingly.

MPD Psycho Siren Visual 3 Disc Set R4 DVD

MPD Psycho is a very strange six part miniseries directed by Takashi Miike. It is based on a rather extreme and graphic comic book, but as it was made for Japanese TV it has been stripped of a lot of the gore.

Miike made a rather quirky decision in regards to the series, when he was required to censor the nudity scenes he decided, by way of protest, to also censor all scenes of violence and gore as well. Accordingly, any graphic content is covered by a blur and this really has a detrimental effect on the whole series.



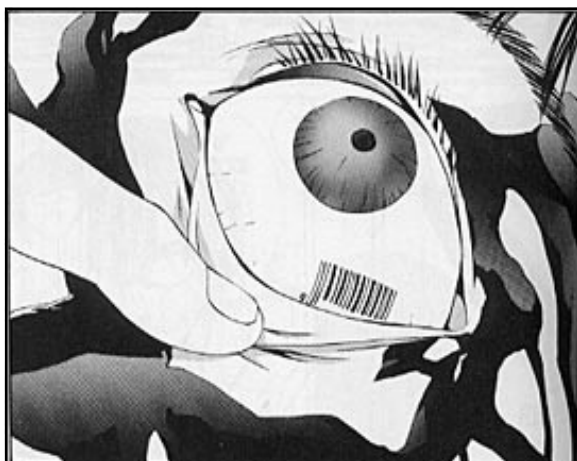
The story centres on a serial killer named Shinji Nishozono who has died. However, all is not as it seems, he can transfer his essence via digital means and starts to infect others. Now this many seem strange but it is only the start of the weirdness of MPD Psycho. The detective in charge of the case is Amamiya but this is only one aspect of his personality. It seems he witnessed his wife get butchered by Nishozono and developed multiple personalities in response, as Amamiya he kills an unarmed suspect but as Yousuke Kobayashi cannot remember doing so.

Nishozono's digital essence is now being transferred to others who then develop a digital bar code on their eyeballs after receiving a call from Lucy Monostone who sings them a strange psychedelic song.

While MPD Psycho is surreal and intriguing it is really let down by the censoring. It covers so much of the action of the film and makes the series fairly ineffectual by removing a lot of the shock value of pivotal scenes as well as much of the suspense and quite a bit of the context. Sometimes you see a killing, yet lose most of the details as they have been textured over.

At the same time, there are lots of weird, strange and downright bizarre scenes in MPD Psycho which make it an interesting series. Some of the special effects are pretty lame, especially later in the series, but there is enough there to sustain your interest.

After watching the whole series I end up being in two minds, I generally love Miike films but the combination of digital censoring (and it seems there is no uncensored edition available) and



MPD Psycho is based on a Manga of the same title

extremely surreal nature of the plot which at times borders on nonsensical, makes it hard to reach a final conclusion about what I actually think about it.

Fans of Miike are also divided about this one, so I suggest you watch it yourself and make up your own mind.

Naked For Satan So Demented- Cinema R2 DVD

Naked for Satan (Nuda Per Satana) by Luigi Batzella is a surreal journey into eroticism, sex, madness and murder.

It is not a film which can be watched in any sort of "rational" manner, it is a phantasmagoria of images including lots of nudity, eroticism and explicit sex.

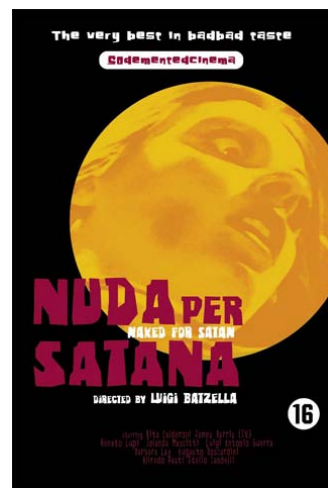
While the explicit XXX scenes are nicely presented and fit well into the film, the lesbian shots look less than believable, it is clear that these women are doing it for the money and really have no idea what they are doing and are just making it up as they go along !

They spent a lot of time trying not to get intimate with each other and when they do they seem to have no idea of how to use their tongues - it especially looks rather peculiar when they spin their tongues like kitchen mix-masters !

The plot is suitably weird, a doctor is called out to an emergency call and struggling through bad weather crashes his car at the same time another car crashes down the road. They both go to the only building in sight, a castle.

As they arrive the world around them changes, time seems to be distorted and they are transported into some sort of pain and pleasure palace run by Satan himself.

While this all sounds rather ridiculous and to be honest it is, the sheer insanity of the plot makes the film somehow seductive.





The rather dapper Satan figure from *Naked Underneath*

This is eurotrash cinema with an edge, filled with perversity and madness, from sex with a candle to a woman attacked by a giant spider after falling through space and time into a full size web !

It is so incredibly bizarre that you just have to watch it until the end and wonder why this was made this time and time again. The orgy at the end is especially strange with Seventies style dancing boys, piles of nudity and oral sex and a climatic letdown as the male character realizes that Satan can be destroyed by fire and a simple lighter saves the day !

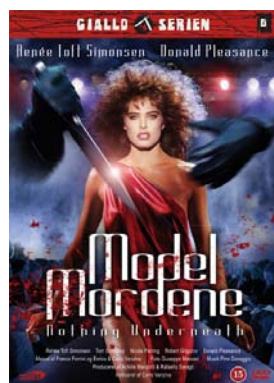
The movie is presented in widescreen format with English or Italian sound (Dolby 2.0). You can choose between Dutch, French and English subtitles.

So Demented Cinema

Web: <http://www.filmfreaks.nl/>

Nothing Underneath Another World Entertainment 2008 R2 DVD

Carlo Vanzina's *Nothing Underneath* is a long forgotten Giallo. It has a truly beautiful "look" and has many interesting story twists and has that superb "European" mood which makes these films so entertaining. It has not been generally available on DVD and it is great to see this edition from Another World Entertainment which features an impressive transfer and excellent sound.



The story has an unusual central focus; there is Tom who is a forest ranger in Yellowstone Park in Wyoming and Jessica who now works in Milan as a fashion model. The film opens with some stunning cinematography showing the natural beauty of the park with its cascading falls and rugged mountains.

While Tom is checking on some tourists, he experiences a series of strange sensations and realizes Jessica is in danger. It seems that Tom and Jessica as twins have a psychic connection which makes them become aware when the other is in peril.

Tom first experiences disorientation and a loss of feeling in his arm and this is intercut with scenes of Jessica being manhandled at a disco. However, things soon get worse, Tom vividly sees Jessica attacked and murdered by a killer with a large pair of scissors. While he can see the event through "Jessica's Eyes" he cannot see the killer. He calls the hotel, but she is not in her room and after he flies to Milan, he realizes she is missing.

He reports his vision to the police Commissioner Danesi (played superbly by Donald Pleasence), and while Danesi is unsure whether to take him seriously is concerned by the fact that a young model is missing. As another model turns up dead and then another, it becomes clear that they are missing something from their investigation.

This is where the story gets rather smart, the major figure of suspicion turns out to be rather nasty and revolting, but not necessarily the killer. Slowly a tale unfolds of drugs, sex and dangerous games and a lover seeking revenge.

This is a beautiful looking film, from the mountains and valleys of Wyoming to the urban landscape of Rome. This also emphasizes the contrast between Tom and Jessica, Tom is the country boy who works outdoors and likes nature and animals, while Jessica (who it is inferred is a Lesbian) could not wait to escape the narrow confines of Wyoming and her family.

Of course *Naked Underneath* is also packed with naked and semi naked beautiful models, indeed there is not many scenes when someone is not in a state of undress !



Beautiful Jessica with a very Eighties Haircut !

The acting is credible; the plotline intriguing and believable, one could just imagine this story unfolding in the real world of high fashion.

I especially liked Pleasence, he came across so well as an old, exhausted police commissioner, just about to retire having seen it all but wanting to do the best for the young man and his missing sister. The climax of the movie was suitably shocking and certainly a little sad, obsessive love gone so terribly wrong.

AWE titles are sometimes hard to get hold of outside of Europe and so good places to purchase are via Amazon.uk or Diabolik DVD: <http://www.diabolikdvd.com>

The Perfume of the Lady in Black Il Profumo Della Signora In Nero R0 PAL DVD Raro Video

The Perfume of the Lady in Black is a strange and enigmatic work of Giallo cinema, which seems to combine the conventions of traditional Giallo cinema with a touch of a horror film, specifically in the vein of Rosemary's Baby.

Silvia is a scientist who is obsessively dedicated to her job. She has a rather good looking Italian lover Roberto, however, she is not really ready for commitment due to the demanding nature of



her work and memories of her dysfunctional childhood.

She attends a party at the home of a highly respected African professor who explains the nature of Voodoo and other occult traditions and this coupled with a later encounter with a psychic seems to unlock memories of her childhood which she has since suppressed. These trigger a series of hallucinations which cause her life to spiral out of control.

The film constantly moves between a number of different themes including Silvia's childhood and a possible conspiracy involving her friends. At times you are not sure whether this is an occult thriller, a psychological drama or even a crime tale and this lack of clarity actually makes the film a rather successful work of cinema. There are all sorts of strange and quirky events which add to the dreamlike quality of the film.

The cinematography is beautiful with superb use of colour, texture and imagery, the spiralling stair case in Silvia's building seems an apt image of her decline into the unconscious and ultimately into madness.

The slow revealing of Silvia's dysfunctional childhood works well, rather than reveal it in one go, you bit by bit come to appreciate the horrible events that occurred. It seems all too clear that her father died while at sea and that her step father had quite an interest in her, since her mother did nothing to protect her, in a moment of psychological instability she pushed her mother off a balcony to her death.

As Silvia has more and more hallucinations you begin to wonder if her mental state is the major focus of what is occurring or whether there is something more sinister manipulating events from the background. Why does her neighbour have a human finger in his cat food ?

While there is no doubt that her mind is disintegrating under the strain of remembering her childhood, there seems to be something else at play, it is as if these memories are being used by someone else.

As you watch her friends, you see them all meet together in a strange underground tunnel and they seem to share a common bond which excludes Silvia. Yet we are offered no explanation of what this bond is or what they are doing.

Her hallucinations become so severe her psyche splits into the “child” Silvia and the “adult” Silvia, who identifies as her mother, and in some attempt at redemption she throws herself off the roof of the building in which she lives in a re-enactment of her childhood trauma.

This, of course, leads to the truly bizarre ending when we realize that all her friends are members of a secret occult society and have been manipulating her psychological disintegration.

The people she believes she had murdered are all members of the cult and it seems the whole episode has been stage managed as part of a ritual which cumulates in her being eaten cannibal style by all the cult’s initiates !

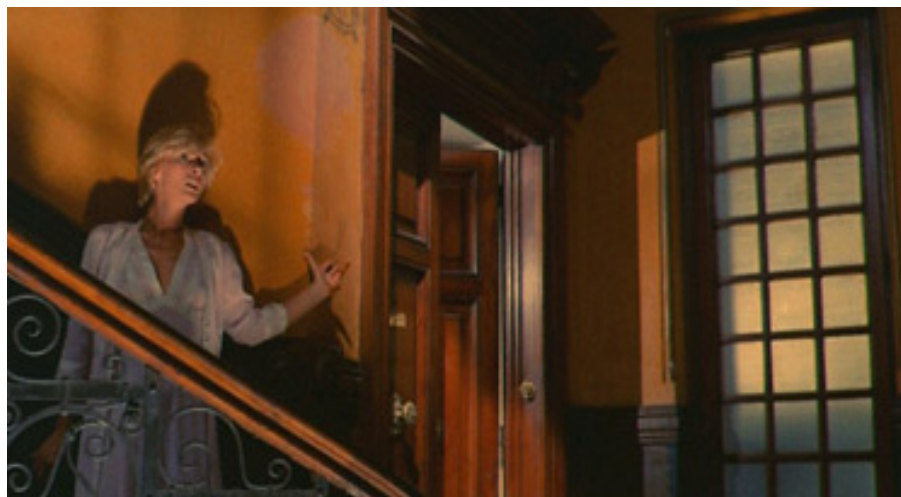
It is truly a perverse scene as very ordinary people, dressed in work coats, fight to get access to her flesh so they can consume it.

The Perfume of the Lady in Black is certainly a very unusual Giallo, the violence comes quite late in the film and most of the film is spent working on the creation of a truly creepy mood through the use of music, colour, texture and occasional ethereal images such as flashbacks of her dead mother or weird occurrences such as flowers dying overnight and yet being normal in the morning.

This leisurely emphasis on character development, mood and texture is very successful and makes the climax even more powerful. This is a different sort of Giallo and one I think you will find a rather intriguing cinematic experience.

Web: <http://www.rarovideo.com>

Silvia descending into Madness in The Perfume of the Lady in Black



S & M Hunter Pinkeiga All Region DVD

S & M Hunter is a superb example of what is known as Japanese Pink Cinema, essentially unusual and witty sex films (most of which could be defined as softcore) made by independent studios.



It is probably best described as a mixture of live action Hentai (literally adult or sex Anime) and a Western ! It has a real Manga feel, especially in it’s over the top and otherworldly plot.

It was made in 1986 by Shuji Kataoka and is a very outrageous experience.

The film opens on the “Pleasure Dungeon” a semi religious sex club where every desire can be met. The members are dressed as monks and nuns except for the “Hunter” who is a cowboy priest !

We are giving an opening spiel about the Dungeon and the pleasures it offers as well as to whom they tend to appeal.

This is a fun and witty introduction with such insights as most sadists are accountants and most drag queens are athletes (especially footballers since they are all gay !).

Each one illustrated by the Dungeon Master himself, offering his personal experience of each scenario ! This heralds the politically incorrect humour which continues throughout the film.

Joe arrives and makes his choice and after degrading Maria who is dressed as a nun, gives her a some good hard whipping which results in her passing out, seems more than a little unsatisfied.

The Dungeon Master being intuitively attuned to the sexual desires of others, sees in his eyes that he is not really into the sort of “games” on offer and asks Joe what he really needs.

The Dungeon is then lit up as the S & M Hunter enters, a true woman “tamer”, who controls them by enflaming their passions through ropes rather than degrading them through violence—he makes them want it !

The S & M Hunter shows Joe his stuff by subjecting Maria to a rope tying she will never forget. It seems there are various types of erotic rope work including Shinju (breast binding), Sukaranbo (which focuses on the vagina) and Karada (a whole body technique), the S & M Hunter is a master of them all and a few more to boot.



We soon learn the Joe is actually gay and his lover is being held captive by a group of angry woman called The Bombers.

Each day they are taking advantage of him and we see the poor boy forced to indulge in all sorts of sexual activity he would rather avoid ! The girls fight over him and then subject him to their passions !

The S & M Hunter takes on the job and he frees Jack by subjecting each of the women to various rope tortures – one is tied in a net with a carefully placed vibrator, the other locked in a gigantic spider web of rope.

However, things don't go quite as planned, while he has freed Jack (to Joe's very obvious satisfaction) and has seduced the gang's leader

The Spiderweb !



The S & M Hunter

Machi with some especially persuasive rope work, Meg, a figure from his past returns and a showdown is on the cards.

Meg castigates the girls for allowing a man to get the better of them and dressing herself in a Nazi uniform under a swastika flag, heads off to confront and destroy her adversary. The final battle is brutal indeed and the S & M Hunter is blinded, but that does not stop him. He ties Meg to a truck and hoists her into the air where she is finally forced to give in to the pleasure of his ropes and his manhood.

This is a truly outrageous film, filled to the very brim with eroticism, political incorrectness, humour and the strangest plot you could ever imagine. At the same time it works on many levels – it is very sexy, funny and supremely entertaining. The various elements are all brought together to create one of the most eccentric pieces of cinema you will see in a long time. I loved it, indeed, I think I will go and watch it again now !

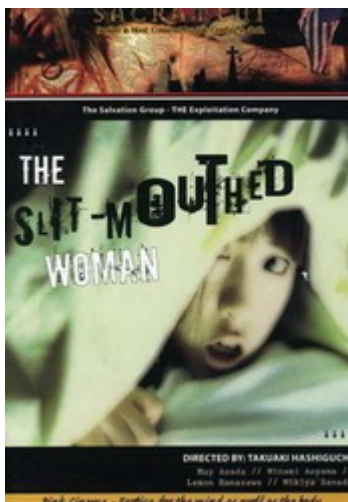
The DVD from Pinkeiga offers a high quality widescreen print with Japanese language and clear English subtitles. There are also various biographies and filmographies and some trailers.

Pinkeiga

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>

The Slit-Mouthed Woman
Sacrament Films
Salvation Group
All Region DVD

The Slit-Mouthed Woman is an intriguing and haunting ghost story. It is only a shade over an hour in length and yet with stylish filming and careful directing it is a disturbing work of cinema.



The Slit-Mouthed Woman is a traditional Japanese tale but here it has been given a very modern twist. The film opens with a doctor and nurse slipping off for a “bit of rumpy pump”; they enter a sealed off section of the Tamai hospital and they start to get down to it. However, they both begin to feel uneasy and slowly a dark menacing presence appears with long black hair and the screen goes black. We then see the hospital empty and deserted; it has been left in a state of disrepair and has a do not enter sign on the front.

A newspaper reporter begins to investigate the tale of the “Slit-Mouthed Woman” and finds that all the doctors and most of the patients have died or vanished after a series of strange events and they are all connected to a “forbidden room” at the hospital.

In the first third of the film there are quite a few sex scenes, these are explicit but at a soft porn

A Couple getting down to it in the abandoned hospital are in for a shock !



level, lots of tits and arse but not XXX. Each sex scene seems to strongly emphasize mouths and tongue kissing and this brings attention to what later develops. At first the film seems to be simply a Japanese “Pink” film with lots of sex with a horror plot, but soon it becomes clear that the Slit-Mouthed Woman is actually a rather more interesting horror tale.

The ghost becomes more and more confronting as the plot evolves and uses mirrors and sex to take her revenge. We finally find out that she was in love with a married man and when her family (and ultimately the married man she loved) rejected her, she became obsessed with her looks.

When she could not get the plastic surgery she wanted, she deliberately crashed her car. While she now got the surgery she wanted she was left with two large scars at the sides of her mouth. She left the hospital to face her ex-lover but was chased by the locals who tore off her bandages and ridiculed her for her scarred face. She felt so humiliated that she returned to the hospital and split her mouth open with a blade and committed suicide.

Her unsettled and vengeful spirit began to haunt the hospital and soon any who came in contact with her room or indirectly with others who had come to the hospital (even through relationships and sex) would pay a high price.

While the Slit-Mouthed Woman could have simply been a soft porn excursion into horror, it also explores aspects of Body dysmorphia and addiction to plastic surgery.

It brings together such themes such as love, sex and betrayal, body image, plastic surgery and even familial acceptance of diversity (her father rejected her due to her love of a married man) and unites these in a successful erotic ghost story. Not a mean feat for a relatively short film !

This edition from Sacrament also includes a short film called Birds Of Prey, a text based introduction to Japanese Pink cinema, some trailers (Hurt, Black Mass, and The Witching Hour) and stills.

Japanese with optional English Subtitles (in white)

Visits
Bone House
Asia
R1 DVD

"Today is a special day for the Chinese. It's the fourteenth day of the seventh month... In other words, the Chinese Halloween.

So what's this all about?

It's known that the gates of purgatory will open on this day...

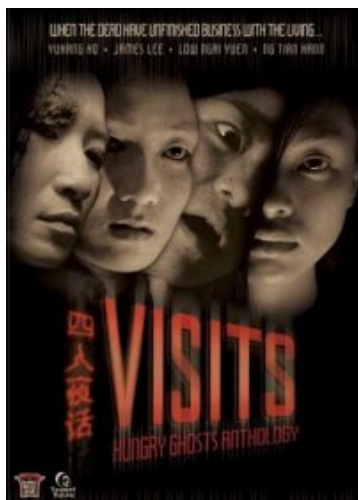
And the hungry ghosts will be released...."

Kuala Lumpur-based producer Lina Tan is celebrating the Hungry Ghost Festival of the Lunar Seventh Month and has collected many tales and stories of the time when the dead cross over into the world of the living. He has presented us with four tales from award winning filmmakers to explore the genre.

The movie is "bookended" by a radio personality discussing tales of the festival and offers a superb anthology of ghost tales, all of which have a twist in the tale (tail).

1413 Directed by Low Ngai

1413 opens with what seems to be deadly suicide pact with bodies photographed from various angles and with a powerful sense of dread and loss. Yuen Mae Ling regains consciousness and is haunted by a pale figure dressed in red. She does not remember what has happened or even if she is responsible for her friend's death. As she regains her memory, the visitor becomes more and more real, but is she



there to take revenge or to help ? This is a ghost story with a nice twist.

Waiting for Them Directed by James Lee

Sam spends her life with people who don't give her what she needs – a work life that is less than challenging, an occasional boyfriend too distant to provide the emotional support she desires, and her depressed friend Ann, with whom she spends long hours on the phone talking over a failed relationship. As Sam becomes upset over a despondent phone from Ann she finds her wondering the street and suddenly open to another realm.

Nodding Scoop Directed by Ng Tian Hann

An aspiring young videographer wants to photograph a spirit conjured during a traditional divination ritual known as the Nodding Scoop. He, of course, is somewhat of a skeptic and wonders if it is all some sort of trick. However when the participants offend the ghost they have summoned, they soon learn that the game they are playing is very risky indeed.

Anybody Home? Directed by Ho Yuhang

Obsession is a dangerous thing and in the modern world, technology can create an environment in which we are never truly alone. But the question is what is watching us and can what we don't know really hurt us ?

Visits is a superb example of subtle filmmaking, there is little blood, gore or violence, with the emphasis on mood, suspense and tension. Each of the ghost stories is intriguing and deliberately ambiguous leaving a lot to the imagination. I especially like the fact that they are in many ways "open ended" and do not offer a traditional easy to understand explanation, but have various possible interpretations. The cinematography is excellent and the music is moody and unpredictable. These are intelligent and refined ghost tales which are set within the context of Asian myth and legend, yet based in the modern world. Each story offers a refreshing take on an age old horror genre.

The video is clear and well presented and the subtitles are clear and easy to follow.

Bone House Asia

Web: <http://www.bonehouseasia.com/>



WEIRD, WACKY & WONDERFUL WORLD CINEMA !

Cellat R0 PAL Onar Films

Cellat (The Executioner) is a very rare 1975 vigilante film from Turkey. It is available in a very limited edition of 500 numbered copies from Onar films and is certainly a superb example of an unusual Turkish genre film. This was the only surviving print in reasonable condition and Onar has done a good job making it available. Also included is a superb 30 minute documentary on Turkish Revenge films from the earliest titles right through to recent releases as well as other extras.

I have always enjoyed vigilante films, I found Robert Ginty in The Exterminator a real treat. In Australia it was The Exterminator series which triggered the "Video Nasties" censorship row and as a result the first Exterminator film was banned and then only released very heavily cut with Exterminator Two being heavily cut to avoid



Orhan's out for Revenge in Cellat



being banned as well. Death Wish was in the same format, traumatized parent or partner pushed too far and when the law fails, he must step in.

Cellat: The Executioner follows in a similar vein. A peaceful architect, his wife and his sister and partner spend a lovely holiday together, filled with quaint conversations, lots of laughs, bush walks and romantic music. However, when they return to Istanbul things are not the same; the newspapers are filled with reports of rapes, robberies and murders.

At first we see three doped up street punks as they wander the street stealing a cabbage from an old lady and fruit from a vendor and they don't seem too dangerous. That is until they follow the architects wife and sister home and launch a home invasion, attacking and raping both the women. One dies from her wounds, the other becomes mentally unstable. The attack is brutal and authentically portrayed.

When the police seem unable to solve the crime Orhan decides to take matters into his own hands. He begins by going to the bank (!) and getting lots of coins which he loads into a sock and uses it to take revenge on his first victims.

However, while surveying a location for a hotel, he takes some pistol lessons and is reminded that "A gun is a man's ornament" and so decides it is the better instrument of his revenge. At first he is torn as his father was killed in a hunting accident and he has avoided guns ever since but a vigilante has to do what he has to do ! After his first kill he is violently ill and returns to lay a rose on his wife's grave telling her he must keep killing to avenge her death.

He now begins a rampage of shooting, finally tracking down the three thugs who attacked his wife and sister, they are despatched in a more

picturesque fashion including an electrocution and in a fire !

This is actually a rather impressive film which adapts the revenge/vigilante motif popular at the time in the West to Turkish Cinema. The dialogue is overdone with constant references to love, justice and devotion with the rising strings of romantic music in the background and this gives it a beautifully exploitation cinema feel. The villains are, of course, two dimensional and the revenge is bloody – what would one expect ? The cinematography is rather nice and the crumbling streets of Istanbul look great.

Yes, this is a rare film and the only surviving print so the picture is a bit “soft” but it is more than watchable and a must have in any exploitation cinema lovers library !

**Latitude Zero
Tokyo Shock
Media Blasters
R1 DVD**

Latitude Zero is one of those films you have to see to believe. Drs. Ken Tashiro, Jules Masson and reporter Perry Lawton have travelled deep under the sea to investigate ocean currents when a volcano erupts and their diving bell is sent adrift. It seems all is lost until they are rescued by Captain Craig McKenzie (played by an aged Joseph Cotten) who operates the submarine Alpha.

As one of the team has been badly injured, McKenzie after some protest and under instruction from the ship’s shapely doctor Anne Barton returns to a utopian kingdom under the waves. Craig seems very much like a Captain Nemo figure, he is supposedly 200 years old (why this is so is never explained) and coordinates a utopian communal settlement which exists at Latitude Zero protected by some sort of electro magnetic field.

On the way back to base the Alpha is attacked by the Black Shark, a submarine which is the property of his opposite number Dr.Malic. Ma-

lic is an evil genius who with his life Lucretia wears outrageous outfits while plotting the downfall of Latitude Zero and indeed the world. McKenzie makes it clear to our scientists that except for the devoted work of Alpha Malic would have taken over the world by now.

Latitude Zero is a full size kingdom under the waves, hidden from the world and filled with scientists who have faked their own disappearances and/or deaths and retired with their families to live in a creative utopian world working to solve the world’s problems. It has its own artificial sun, water fall and buildings from every conceivable style and form reflecting the diversity of all cultures.

The battle lines are drawn over Nobel Prizewinner Dr. Okada who has developed a vaccine against radiation sickness. Rather than allowing one country to use it as a weapon against another, he hopes to retire to Latitude Zero with his daughter and continue his work. Malic has other plans and kidnaps Okada and his daughter and brings them to his secret island, Blood Rock, he wants that formula at any cost.

To rescue Okada McKenzie and his team must infiltrate Blood Rock, battle giant rats and bat creatures, avoid acid pools, magnetic fields and all manner of traps set for them by Malic who knows they are on the way. He wants to get rid of McKenzie once and for all !

Latitude Zero is truly bizarre. Toho has produced one of the most eccentric Sci Fi thrillers imaginable. It seems to combine 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and James Bond with the Thunderbirds.

The Team on board The Alpha



Latitude Zero is obsessed with all manner of whizz bang effects with the submarines, buildings and sets looking like those out of The Thunderbirds. The secret undersea base looks like something out of Jules Verne while Malic's persona and Island is straight out of James Bond, a strange mix indeed.

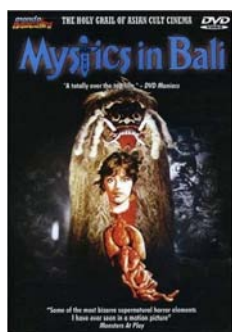
The acting is pretty much constantly over the top with each of the characters being stereotypical, Dr.Malic constantly laughs and snarls as one would expect a villain to do and McKenzie is serene and overflowing with condescending wisdom. The outfits are truly fun and very camp, just look at what they are forced to wear and worse, what the underground city looks like, wow ! Sure it was 1969 but it would have even been outré even for then. I especially liked the batman, the giant rats and griffin, which all look like motorized soft toys !!

Latitude Zero is true B Grade heaven, everything about it is ludicrous and silly. It will have you in stitches, even more so because the actors played it so straight !

Latitude Zero was a Toho release in Japanese with some Hollywood actors to try and give it an international appeal. It was released in both Japanese and US editions in the late Sixties but not seen again for quite some time except on low quality video dups. This new 2 disc release from Tokyo Shock is a real gem, including both the Japanese and US releases, crew interviews, galleries and an extra DVD of previews.

Mystics in Bali Mondo Macabro All Region DVD

Mystics in Bali is considered by many to be the holy grail of Asian cult cinema and it certainly is an outrageous introduction to Indonesian genre films.



An American author, Cathy Kean writes books on strange religions and cults. She has been initiated into Voodoo in Africa but has come to Bali to gain inside knowledge of a highly secretive black magic tradition known as Leyak. It seems the Leyak are able to transform their bodies at will and become any form of life, including taking the form of other humans. They are also able to kill at a glance.

She convinces her Balinese love interest Mane-

dra to introduce her to a Leyak teacher. Leyak Queen is suitably crone like with an unnerving cackle (which continues throughout the film) and requires donations of jewels and blood before things can get underway. The Leyak Queen takes a liking to Cathy and initiates her into the black magic way but, of course, this comes at a great cost. Soon, the Leyak Queen is sending Cathy's detached head (!) on nightly raids to collect blood for the Queen so she can gain immortality.

In one of the film's most notorious scenes Cathy's night flying head with its still-attached heart, lungs, stomach, and intestines trailing behind it, eats a baby from between a young mother's legs while she is in labour. Since the Leyak are shape changers, there are all sorts of bizarre scenes of transformations all sorts of bizarre scenes of transformations including into pigs and snakes.

The Leyak Queen, however, did not plan on the secret knowledge that Madendra's family also has on call and soon a battle of mantras and magic is underway. But not before meandering dialogues on the battle between good and evil, the destruction of culture by greed and the evils of black magic ! The special effects throughout the film are suitably B grade and this gives the film its cult reputation, this is Indonesian exploitation cinema at its most bizarre.

There have been a couple of editions from Mondo Macabro, the first in the UK market and this one as an all region NTSC. This release offers a very clear print, impressive considering how much of the film occurs at night. The dialogue is dubbed in English (there is sadly no Indonesian audio track), but I must admit the amusing nature of the English dub made it even more riotous entertainment.

There are a number of interesting text essays including a filmography of the director, an introduction to Indonesian Exploitation film.



**Cathy becomes a travelling head
searching for blood to feed her teacher.**

The Queen of Black Magic Mondo Macabro All Region NTSC

Kohar is preparing for his wedding to the daughter of the Village Chief, but all does not seem to be going well, one of the village girls Murni is notably upset and returns home in tears. As the wedding begins the Village is beset with a “demonic” disaster, his soon to be wife sees him as a skeleton and loses it big time and the wedding party is attacked by wild storms. Worse, the local witch doctor called in to sort out what has occurred is thrown repeatedly in the air and smashed to the ground, but not before divining that the evil “came from the west”.

Kohar remembers one of his many conquests (he is a real man about town), Murni lives in the west and jumps to the conclusion that it is all her fault. Now certainly she has a beef with him - he convinced her to give over her virginity and then dumped her, a dastardly deed, but beyond that he has little evidence (except perhaps a little guilt). Kohar whips up the villagers into a frenzy and they burn down her home, assault her mother and throw Murni off a cliff.

She crashes through some trees but is saved by an old man before she is dashed to the ground. He takes her back to his secret cabin the



woods. The old man is sympathetic to her plight and nurses her back to health. As she recounts what has occurred, she makes it clear she has not cursed anyone and indeed does not know any black magic. Slowly the old man manipulates her anger and fury informing her that he has just attending her mother's funeral. Finally he offers to initiate her into the forbidden secrets of black magic so she can take revenge. Before long she is having blood poured over her head, flying into the air nude by the light of the moon and smoking out of the top of her skull ! She is now not only ready for revenge but has become “The Queen of Black Magic”. Gone is the innocent young woman replaced by a satanic spelling throwing Minx !

Murni begins her campaign of revenge using all manner of occult powers from sending bee swarms to hanging, body explosions and quicksand. She kidnaps a baby but even the old sorcerer thinks that's too much and makes her take it back. Kill a village of people, sure, but don't kidnap a baby !

When Murni kills Kohar she believes her revenge is completed, but it seems the old sorcerer has an agenda of his own. However, there is a hitch, a holy man devoted to Allah has come from the city, he has rebuilt the mosque and has the locals praying once again. The more devotion the villagers develop the less power the old sorcerer and Murni seem to have, it is time for a showdown and a final revelation about the real motives of the old sorcerer and who the stranger really is.

This is a superb piece of outrageous Indonesian horror/supernatural cinema, fast paced, filled with low grade special effects including exploding body parts and floating heads. It has the traditional good Vs Evil motif of much horror fare, however, this time it is filtered through the lens of Islam. The dialogue is suitably ridiculous with some truly memorable one liners such as when Kohar takes Murni's virginity and she cries that she was keeping it until marriage he tells her ““It was bound to happen sooner or later, so what difference does it make where it happens? One place is as good as another when you're in the right mood.” He is a truly sensitive guy !

The Queen of Black Magic is great entertainment and also includes a documentary on the Indonesian version of Light and Magic run by FX guru El Badrun.



The Queen of Black Magic: From Virgin to Satanic Minx

**OSS 117:
Cairo Nest of Spies
ICA Films
R2 DVD**

French comedian Jean Dujardin is convincing as French Agent OSS 117 aka Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath in this outrageous spy spoof. Based on the 1949 novels by Jean Bruce, the movie brings to life the suave yet highly eccentric character of OSS 117.

He is both refined and yet arrogant, successful in his work and yet terrifying ignorant of what goes on around him. Personally I have always had some trouble with characters such as Maxwell Smart and Inspector Clouseau, I find the bumbling fool persona rather irritating and even perhaps demeaning. I absolutely deplore Mr.Bean.

OSS 117 however is a different type of character, while certainly a bit Maxwell Smart like in his ignorance and terrible mistakes; he is also witty, debonair and intelligent. This is refined humour with smart jokes and some great punch lines set in a James Bond world with a very credible spy drama set within the Middle East.

The story opens with a mission during World War II. OSS agents 117 and his comrade Jack Jefferson are on an airborne mission to steal some blueprints and while they succeed admirably, Jack is later killed.

**French comedian Jean Dujardin as OSS 117
and Larmina El Akmar Betouche**



Jean Dujardin as OSS 117

Not only does OSS 117 want payback but the agency (with direct instructions from the French President Rene Coty) want him to travel to Egypt and solve a brewing international crisis in which everybody is embroiled. The only problem is that OSS 117 knows very little about Arab and Muslim culture and has a truly colonial view of the world he is entering.

With Jack's secretary, Larmina El Akmar Betouche (Berenice Bejo) as his only guide and owner of a Chicken firm in Cairo as a cover, he must investigate Jack's death. He has lots of spies on his trail and the clock is ticking fast !

Along the way he makes appalling errors in etiquette including enquiring "what stupid religion would not allow you to drink alcohol" and stopping a call to prayer as he just thought the muezzin was "making noise".

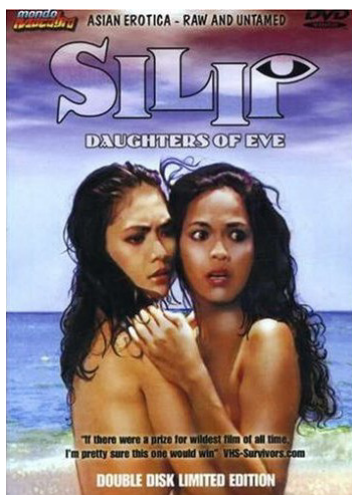
OSS 117 is sexy, suave and self contained, he never questions his judgement nor that of his government, indeed he gives out pictures of President Rene Coty as gifts to the locals !

The background of international politics makes this even more amusing if you appreciate the social, economic and political humour textured throughout the plot. There is a level of intelligence in the plot here which makes it stand out from such comedies as Austin Powers.

The mixture of dry wit, James Bond spy adventure, a lounge/Sixties music score and superb cinematography makes this a highly enjoyable romp through the world of spies, secrets and espionage !

ICA Films
Web: <http://www.ica.org.uk>

Silip
Daughters of Eve
Mondo Macabro
All Region NTSC
2 Disc Ltd Edition



The Philippines has a history of nudity and sex on film but due to the strong influence of Catholicism, they are usually coupled with religious themes and in many cases misogyny and guilt.

Silip is the epitome of such a combination.

The film opens with the killing and butchering of a buffalo, while it may be argued that the killing is clearly for meat, the animal is killed with quite some violence and the children witnessing the killing are clearly traumatized as it is butchered before their eyes. This really sets the tone for Silip, a film where violence and brutality is the way of life.

On one hand we have Simon, who represents the “animalistic” side of the equation; he has sex with whoever he wants, is violent, aggressive and misogynist. Most of the men seem to follow his lead and work all day, using the women simply as sexual entertainment and to propagate children. This is no idealized Eden but a brutal and disturbed paradise.

On the other hand you have Tonya, a tormented woman who is both tempted and repulsed by sex. She is wracked by religious guilt and a hatred of men and at times behaves like the



Simon has his way !



The Children fed by Christian misogyny commit a murder but place the blame elsewhere.

“possessed” Nuns of classic medieval tales. In one scene she writhes and screams demanding the children degrade her by throwing dirt all over her, just like a possessed woman. She is a classic example of sexual suppression and is dangerously neurotic and disturbed. She also is in a constant state of desire, wanting love (and sex) and unable to control her impulses.

The village itself is in a constant state of conflict as Tonya infects the children with her brand of sexually suppressed guilt and hatred of men and the men continue to use and abuse the women. There is a constant contradiction between desire and hatred, suppression of sex and sexuality.

In one shocking scene Tonya explains to a young girl that she is most vulnerable during her first period as the devil takes form as a man who has his “horn” between his legs.

There is no “black and white” morality here, each side is dysfunctional and it is hard to see a resolution. This is more a story about a village in decay, showing the clash of values which brings about the worst excesses from gang rape to murder.

The trigger for the final events is when Selda, Tonya’s sister returns from the big smoke. Selda has learned how to use sex to get what she wants. However, her return triggers the smouldering sexuality of Tonya, the children feel betrayed by her obvious hypocrisy and the village disintegrates, destroying everyone including the children. The scene where the children rage against Simon and kill him is especially powerful.

This is disturbing stuff, Silip is a long film (over two hours) and controversial.

When it was originally shown at the Chicago Film Festival in the Eighties it caused havoc and it is not surprising to see why. It is packed with nudity, rough sex, violence, abuse, a brutal gang rape and killings.

At the same time it is also the tone of the film which is so depressing; it is as though the Catholicism that is present in Philippine culture has so poisoned the village that it cannot be redeemed. While Tonya may represent an extreme example of the personal sexual suppression brought about by religious beliefs she upholds. The message also seems to be that the whole village's moral compass has been distorted by the primitive sex negative values which have been drummed into them by the Church.

Indeed, in the final scene the women are seen as responsible for the killings (even though they are innocent) and burnt.

Even though the men want the women to be sexually "available" for them, they then demonize and hold them responsible for the violence that has decimated the village.

At the same time they are more than happy to gang rape the women for pleasure before they are burnt to death (in a scene which is truly appalling).

The ramifications of the women's death is also startling. One of the children who was involved in Simon's murder tries to tell her mother what happened, but is told to keep quiet, the children learn by example the hypocrisy of the village. They also are clearly shown the lack of value placed on women's lives.

When the priest returns to the village they quietly confess and are forgiven and hence the cycle of sexual and emotional suppression is continued.

The storyline of Silip has much in common with the classic cases of nuns tormented by sexual desire who are burnt as witches for their supposed union with the devil. Indeed it is as though the classic "sexually repressed Nun motif" has been transplanted into a Philippine context and made relevant to their cultural situation, where there is a unique blend of blatant sexuality and Catholic guilt.

Silip explores various different aspects of sexuality and religion including the degradation of women, violence and the religious construction

of masculinity, guilt created by religious beliefs leading to self hatred and even hatred of the object of desire. Ultimately, Silip is a tale of the effect of dysfunctional religious values on a community.

There are two soundtracks offered, the international soundtrack which is dubbed in English with an awful music score. It is a poor substitute for the original soundtrack which includes a haunting musical score and clear subtitles and has really only been included for completeness.

The second DVD is loaded with extras including cast and crew biographies, a fascinating text essay on the nature of Philippine cinema, interviews with Director Elwood Perez, actress Maria Isabel Lopez and art director Alfredo Santos.

Web: <http://www.mondomacabrodvd.com>

**Sister Emanuelle
Another World
Entertainment
Denmark
R2 DVD**

Various editions of Sister Emanuelle are available around the world; sadly, most of them are soft core editions and are hence missing a lot of the action.



The original masters of the unedited edition have been lost and AWE have worked hard to recreate the hardcore edition from original soft core masters and videos of the edited footage.

The DVD release includes both the soft core (87 minutes) and the hardcore (92 minutes) editions. It is in English and includes various subtitle options include Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish. It is a region 2 PAL release and very impressive.

It is surprising what a difference five minutes can do to both the mood and feel of a film and the hard core edition is certainly the recommended option. It is what the director obviously intended and not only includes more flesh but fills out the plot.



Sexy Nunsplotation in Sister Emanuelle

In this tale, Laura Gemser, who many believe to be the ultimate Emmanuelle actress, is placed into the role of a nun- accordingly we have every possible male fantasy – nuns, lesbianism, a stunning female lead lots of sex and did I say lesbianism ! Emanuelle has given up her lustful past and become a nun in a very strict tradition.

She has been sent to Venice to meet with a very wealthy patron and take his daughter back to the nunnery. It seems his daughter has been caught having a very hot lesbian affair with her stepmother, indeed later in the film we see this affair in flashback – it is amazing the uses a banana can be put to!

The first scenes in the film as the Nuns travel by boat to the train with the daughter and stepmother all over each other are literally dripping with eroticism and this balance of explicit sexuality and eroticism is what makes this film so successful.

Emanuelle and an elderly nun start the journey to take Monika back to the convent, but as they travel the long distance on the train, Emanuelle's is taken by Monika's rampant sexu-

ality and her desires are stimulated and she falls to sleep experiencing a range of wild dreams which become the basis for the film.

Along the way we are treated to all sorts of lesbian sex, flashbacks of Monika and her stepmother's banana exploration, an escaped murderer who seduces both Monika and Emanuelle and lots more. We only realize that the story is a series of dreams when she awakens after the train journey, takes Monika to the Convent and then leaves, realizing that the life of the Nun is not for her. Yah for Emanuelle !

This is certainly one of the better Emanuelle films packed with eroticism as well as explicit sex, it also has a very cool Seventies soundtrack. Many believe this is one of the best Emanuelle films in the franchise and it is hard not to agree, it has a superb European exploitation feel which makes every moment a joy !

Web: <http://www.anotherworldent.com/>

Sword of Alexander R4 DVD Madman Entertainment

The Sword of Alexander is outrageous entertainment, sometimes bloody, always filled with action and most of the time incredibly silly, funny and ridiculous cinema.



It brings together every possible myth and legend to create a rip roaring fantasy which combines a wide variety of genres from Samurai to Japanese action, from science fiction to even a bit of monster horror.

The storyline is suitably bizarre yet based squarely in the world of myth and legend.

Indeed, many years ago (1973) a rather strange occultist wrote a supposed factual book called The Sword of Destiny in



in which he claimed that there were various sacred items which, if combined, would give the owner world domination.

He even claimed Hitler invaded Austria to get the lance were various sacred items which, if combined, would give the owner world domination. He even claimed Hitler invaded Austria to get the lance which pierced Christ's side as it was one of the items !

Only the "lunatic fringe" took him seriously, but myth and legends, strange tales and weird beliefs are the stuff fantasies are made of and seep into all manner of films.

In The Sword of Alexander we have a more multicultural set of items but with a similarly bizarre agenda – The Sword of Alexander (Greek) – a damn big claymore, the Thunderbolt of Skanda (Hindu) and the Cross of Judas (Christian – well, nearly).

It seems these items are made of a special substance not found on earth which offers the "power of god" when wielded by the chosen one.

Genkuro Yorozu is a huge warrior who wields the claymore; he received it from his grandfather who was some sort of missionary. In respect for his grandfather's dying wishes he is in search of the other two artefacts to return the three of them to their rightful owner. However, he is not the only one in search of such infinite power and some of them are not even human !

Genkuro Vs The Mad Monk



The Mad Monk Possessed by alien forces !

Along the way we get treated to battling Samurai clans, occult masters, alien possessions, monsters and creatures and lots more. The first section is like a science fiction film and then moves into a strange Samurai film ! An amazingly weird combination.

This is such a bizarre fantasy film, packed with B grade goodness. The climax of the film is suitably extreme, the three objects are brought together and Genkuro becomes the sacred warrior.

He fights the evil creature, who is now a demon possessed monk, with the assistance of his love interest and her attendant.

After a great battle the demon will not die and becomes a disengaged brain with spinal stem attached which continues the battle nevertheless.

But that is not the end, when it has again seemingly lost the battle, it does not die but its separated body (inside out) reanimates and attacks again. It is one of the most over the top and silly climaxes to a film I have seen in a long while !

Throughout the film we are treated to a sort of running tongue in cheek commentary by a voice over.

Sword of Alexander is that sort of film - ridiculous, fun, over the top and raucous entertainment.

WORLD CINEMA



A Year Without Love Peccadillo Pictures R2 DVD

A Year Without Love is a surprisingly powerful Spanish film. It is 1996 and Pablo Pérez, a young Argentine man is turning thirty and trying to make sense of his life.

He is suffering from HIV/AIDS and now adjusting to the effects it is having on his body and mind. He has heard the rumours about the side effects of AZT and yet knows his cell count is low and he may have to take it to survive. He regularly goes to hospitals for treatment but refuses their advice trying to treat his symptoms with herbals remedies and diet.

He is in the middle of an existential crisis which includes a wide and unrestrained search for sex and love in the sexual underground.



He lives with his rather annoying aunt in a small one bedroom apartment but cannot afford to live on his own. He makes petty cash teaching French.

His first attempts at finding companionship include trips to sleazy sex cinemas, primitive cha-trooms and ads in various gay magazines. However his honesty about his health makes long term relationships difficult, even short encounters are tinged with fear as he worries about his ongoing breathing problems and his persistent cough.

As he begins to wonder about the nature of life, he meets the Sherriff, a bondage top and his assistant. Pablo begins to find a new sense of meaning as he explores the underground leather and S & M sense in Buenos Aires. Slowly he finds a sense of belonging as he transcends both pleasure and pain with his new companions.

The Sherriff is a demanding master and offers much, but in the end Pablo does not seem to find the emotional satisfaction he so desperately needs.

For those not aware of S & M and bondage, this film may come as a bit of a shock. Its portrayal of sex as well as bondage, S & M is explicit without being pornographic and is done in such a way that it works well within the context of the plot. It is certainly not gratuitous nor exploitative.

The sheer honesty and realism of A Year Without Love makes it an impressive film. This is not a work of sentimentality, a plea for acceptance, nor a whitewash of the sexual underground. It simply it as it is.

It simply documents one gay man's search for love in a byways of life with a melancholic eye which will resonant with many who watch it.

I found A Year Without Love a insightful yet confronting work of cinema.



Pablo explores his boundaries with the Sheriff through pain and pleasure pushed to the limits.

The Edge of Heaven
Madman 2009
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Turkish, German, English. Subtitled in white over picture.

This is an unusual but rather compelling film, following six people as their lives become indirectly involved through each others' tragedies. It is more a series of short stories, each taking up from where the previous character leaves off.

We start in Bremen in Germany where Yeter, a Turkish illegal immigrant, is working as a prostitute. She is being harassed by local Turkish Muslims, but needs to keep working to send money home to her daughter. She meets Ali (Tuncel Kurtiz), another Turkish immigrant. He is a lonely widower and invites her to live with him for company and sex. At Ali's home she meets Nejat (Baki Davrak), Ali's son, and they become fond of each other. Ali in a fit of drunken jealousy kills Yeter and is jailed.

The storyline now switches to Nejat. He returns to Turkey to find Yeter's daughter to tell her what has happened. He is unsuccessful, because Ayten, the daughter, is involved in a Kurdish freedom movement and is wanted by



the police. She was involved in a riot in which a policeman was killed and his gun stolen. Ayten has hidden the gun and fled to Germany, where she is now looking for her mother.

Alone and destitute in Bremen she cannot find her mother. She is befriended by a German student, Lotte. A lesbian relationship develops, against the wishes of Lotte's mother. When Ayten is picked up by the police and repatriated to Turkey Lotte follows her. Ayten asks her to retrieve the hidden gun and while doing so Lotte is accidentally killed.

Lotte's mother comes to Turkey to find out what happened. The story continues as the characters keep becoming involved with each other. Most of the involvements end in tragedy.

The stories are particularly sad in that each character falls from a comparatively comfortable life into something darker because of their involvement with each other. None of the characters is particularly evil, but there is something inevitable and painful about the descent into chaos and tragedy as each life is destroyed.

A story like this could not be carried off without strong actors. Baki Davrak plays his role with sympathy as the young politically immature Professor caught in the political turmoil in Turkey. Nurgül Yesilçay plays the part of Ayten with intensity and toughness that befits a revolutionary, but she still manages to look lost and lonely and on the edge of breakdown as she searches for her mother or as she awaits deportation. Hanna Schygulla as Lotte's mother gives a tremendous performance as the most sympathetic of the characters, lost in her grief at her daughter's death and searching for some meaning in it all.

Although the story could be in danger of becoming lightweight, the strong acting and tight screenplay carry it off. It does not attempt to preach, although there seems to be plenty to work on – political repression, violent protest, treatment of illegal immigrants. The film simply shows the intertwining of the lives of a group of people against the problems of modern Europe. It thoroughly deserves the awards it has achieved.



Nejat and Yeter

Goya
DEFA
First Run Features
R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This film was originally made in 1971 in East Germany on 70mm film. It has since been digitally restored and re-released in this Director's Cut by Konrad Wolf.



Although historical dramas rarely interest me, this one attracted me with its beautiful photography and the great acting of its Lithuanian star, Donatas Banionis. He plays the part of a successful Court painter suffering from deafness with sympathy and a slightly demented touch.

Goya rose to fame at a time when the ineffectual King Carlos IV was nominally ruling his part of Spain, strongly influenced by his powerful wife. The influence of the Inquisition was widespread and ruthless, and sometimes competing with the Court. The Inquisition saw itself as the guardian of Christianity and was working to purge Spain of non-Christian influences like Jewry, Islam, and heresy. Goya contented himself with painting royalty, which brought him money and fame and kept him in favour at Court. His womanizing, however, led him to the notice of the Inquisition.

A female singer he admired in a tavern became a victim of the Inquisition and was sentenced to burn at the stake for heresy, for singing revolutionary songs. In a timid fit of revolt Goya painted a series of pictures of the common people in their everyday life – markets, bullfights, religious observances. These were unconventional subjects at the time and attracted the attention of the Inquisition. Although the paintings were ruled inoffensive to the Church, the Inquisition's closer attention to his work was inevitable. Goya resented the church interference in freedom of expression, but he was powerless to do anything about it. From early in the film it is obvious that Goya is going to have trouble with one or the other of the opposing powers, or both

Goya had an affair with a beautiful Duchess, which both the Court and the Inquisition disapproved of. The Duchess was eventually virtually exiled from the Court but Goya followed her. When the Duchess left him to return to Court,

Goya also returned, but took his time to study the country and its ordinary people.

What he saw led him to paint their hardships and sufferings, as a result of war, in a series of nightmarish, surreal works that definitely raised the ire of the Inquisition. He also painted allegorical works and pamphlets that savagely ridiculed the Court. He was forced to flee Spain.

The story of a man caught between two powerful forces is not new, but Goya's happy-go-lucky spirit, as played by Banionis, is gradually crushed by the two forces. The conflict and contrast between the two power centers, church and Court, is brought out well by Angel Wagenstein's intelligent script.

Mieczyslaw Voit's Chief Inquisitor is understated but filled with the menace that comes from absolute power. As a period piece the film perhaps lacks that glorious attention to costume so beloved of the English, but the somewhat less elaborate costume of the members of the Court contrasts with the lavish, ridiculously overdone traditional vestments worn by the Inquisition and their lackeys.

Rather surprisingly, it appears to lack a propaganda element that could be expected from an Iron Curtain film of the time. The elements are there – ineffectual royalty, evil church, and Goya the man of the common people – but the film does not emphasize these to the detriment of the plot.

The film is in German, with English subtitles. While the subtitles are in white superimposed on the background and are not always as clear as they could be, Banionis' brilliant acting carries the story well. For a film that is now nearly forty years old, Goya is a great piece of cinema that has gained new life from its restoration and rerelease.

Extras:

Interviews with Angel Wagenstein (writer) and Tatjana Lolowa (actress).

The interview with Angel Wagenstein clears up a number of the matters raised earlier. He points out that the film is a veiled reference to the influence of the Communist Party in the mid 1960s, when it was increasing censorship and interfering with the freedom of expression of the arts. In the review above, read "Party" for "Inquisition" and see how it fits.

For the Court, read the minor Party functionaries whose corruption marred the ideals of Communism and imposed its own controls on artistic freedoms.

Goya was in the same position as an Iron Curtain artist – not entirely free to use his talents and run his life due to pressure from those he depended on to ply his trade.

The closer he got to those in power, the more he could see their corruption. DEFA, the East German film company who made the film, may have got away with it because of the range of international actors and staff that they used. Welding a film making group out of people from more than ten countries with differing language and customs was quite an achievement.

In This World
Dendy
Magna Pacific 2005
(Australia)
R4 DVD
Sundance—R1 DVD

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

This is a film that is very hard to form a reaction to. It is the story of a young Afghani youth who, with his cousin, tries to leave the poverty and hopelessness of his refugee camp in Pakistan and travel to the supposed Promised Land of London.

The re-enactment covers his trials at the hands of the people smugglers, the people both good and bad who help him along the way, and the rather disappointing end when he gets to London. The film is based on the experiences of real refugees, and looks authentic.

If you believe that these refugees are genuinely oppressed, badly treated, and should be treated as victims of the modern international situation, you do not need to see this film. If, like me, you are trying to find out WHY they do this, you are going to be disappointed.

The film tends towards the superficial in that it leaves so many areas unexplained. It offers no particular ration-

ale for wanting to go to London (or, as is mentioned a couple of times, the U.S.) There appears to be no attempt to mention the dangers of the journey, let alone the fact that at the end of his journey Britain may not even want him.

Would he be better off staying in his own country and trying to improve himself there? In this, I can't help but contrast Jamal with Niaz in "Son of a Lion", a film reviewed in Synergy earlier this year. Niaz wants to learn to read and write to better himself in his own country. Jamal just seems to want to get out.

Jamal seems to have a hard but basic life in the refugee camp, and works in the local brick-works. When he finally gets to London his employment in this "Paradise" is as a dishwasher, so has he really improved his lot?

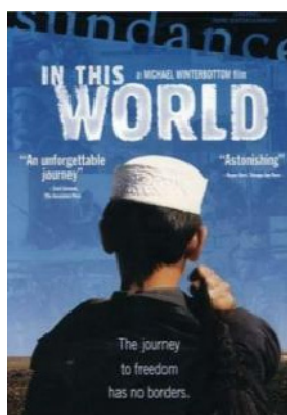
Then his application for refugee status fails and he is required to leave Britain before his eighteenth birthday anyway, so what was the point?

I think the film would have been more convincing and less documentary-like had Winterbottom looked at these issues as well.

The end of the film, where a simple text screen announces that he was required to leave the country, is very unconvincing when we know the film is a re-enactment of a mythical composite case anyway.

Why does he have to leave?
What does he feel about it?
What does the British government feel about his illegal entry?

In This World, Dir Michael Winterbottom, UK 2003



How about his family back in Pakistan who are now thousands of dollars out of pocket?

These points aside, the film is engrossing. The links involved in the human smuggling trade are impressive and callous. Jamal's mistrust of the smugglers is fully justified, as he and his cousin are cheated, robbed, and look like finishing up as illegal slave workers in a Teheran factory. Since his cousin can't speak many languages, Jamal must handle the communication and make most of the decisions.

At sixteen, he shows a greater maturity than his older cousin. Even so, there are problems which are beyond his abilities to work around and at one stage they are caught by Iranian police and sent back across the border to Pakistan.

The acting is rarely brilliant and the handheld camera work can be a bit tiresome but the changing countries, people and customs are an interesting background to Jamal's journey. Most of the trip for Jamal and his fellow refugees, is spent in a sort of fugue as they simply wait to get to the next stage of their journey. Friendships are brief, moments of happiness few. Jamal's final entry to Britain, a country seriously hostile to illegals, is glossed over and not explained.

Overall, the film is worth a close look. As a reenactment documentary on the cruelties of people smuggling it is effective and powerful. Just don't expect too much more from it.

Keoma
DFW (Holland)
Anchor Bay US

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Ah, the good old spaghetti western. So-called because it was a western-type film made by Italian producers, generally in Spain, for the European market. In many ways they turned out far more realistic films than their U.S. counterparts. The characters looked real – filthy, half-shaven, bad tempered.

The villains could look really evil – even if they were U.S. imports, they somehow managed to look more evil in the harsh Spanish lighting. Lee Van Cleef in the classic *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* is a prime example. Even the towns

looked more like what you would expect from the wild west – cheap wooden shacks lining a dusty main street, with the saloon the only pretentious building and not a tree in sight.

With cheap actors and construction costs, producers could indulge themselves. Films could be crafted, with superb photography lovingly perfected rather than rushed to a schedule. The slow build-up as the protagonists confronted each other in a gunfight became a trademark. Closeup shots could dwell on every pimple on a baddie's nose.

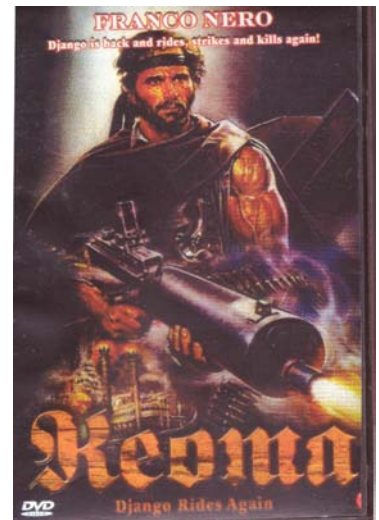
If you wanted a town full of people, or a huge mob of cattle, or a large group of cowboys to rustle them, extras were cheap. Reputations were well made on the spaghetti western, and it's good to see the genre continued in this film.

Franco Nero's career goes back to 1966, and he has done a number of westerns. Perhaps his most famous was as the gunslinger Django, and that may be why this film is alternatively known as *Django Rides Again*. After 150 films, Nero has slowed down a bit and now prefers to do smaller supporting roles. In this film, however, he doesn't appear to have slowed down much.

The story is fairly conventional. Keoma (Nero) has been off at the Civil War, leaving his father and three half-brothers behind. The brothers have fallen in with the evil Caldwell, a mine-owner whose intention is to drive the people out and take over the town.

A plague has broken out and Caldwell's men are interning the plague victims in a camp at the mine. Keoma arrives in time to witness the shooting of some of the victims, and rescues a non-infected pregnant woman, the wife of one of the victims.

From here on he is marked for death by Caldwell's men and his brothers.





Kizil Tug Gengis Han
Red Plume Genghis Khan
Onar Films 2008
All Region DVD
Web: <http://www.onarfilms.com>

The unstoppable force which was the Mongol Empire that cut a swathe from the Pacific to the Mediterranean has always been a great subject for spectacular cinema.

From the classic 1965 film *Genghis Khan* by Henry Levin starring Omar Sharif to the latest extravaganza *Mongol*.

There are the expected chases through town, gunfights in the saloon, fistfights, etc. In the end Keoma loses and is tied to a steam engine wheel (a very thinly veiled crucifixion) to await his hanging.

Help arrives from an unexpected source and the final showdown between Keoma and his half brothers ensues. And at the end of it all he rides off into the sunset in the approved manner.

Nero doesn't get much of a script to work with. The film is strong on action and short on characterization. Director Enzo Castellari keeps pushing the action right through the film, so there is not much time for character development, but the action is great.

There are some fine supporting actors, though, mostly fairly unknown Italians, and they contribute to a film that is a fine example of the genre.

There is an amusing point about the Dutch edition. The cover slick seems to have been taken from a leftover *Rambo* poster and had Nero's head stuck on it, badly out of scale.

The character carries a machine gun (there isn't one in the film) and much less hair than Nero. It also has a riverboat in the background, which is has nothing to do with the film – it takes part in a desert town.

I must assume the cover designer was having a bad day and didn't actually watch the film.

I did watch it, however, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

There were also the many Italian adaptations usually filled with abundant sword and sandal action. Preceding many of the Italian Peplum Sword films was a rare and believed lost Turkish film called *Kizil Tug Gengis Han*, amazingly Onar Films has found a copy and made it available in a limited edition.

While *Genghis Khan* is significant in this film, he really isn't the prime focus. Ostukarci is a warrior who while having little by the way of wealth makes up for it with dedication to his homeland and his great abilities with the sword.

He teams up with Khan to defeat a rival warlord but has no interest in the greater path of conquest. However, out of respect for Khan Ostukarci agrees to undertake what seems to be a

Great Battle Scenes from the 1952 Red Plume Genghis Khan





Ethel dancing for petty cash

As the film slowly unfolds over two hours you find the line between reality and fantasy dissolving and get carried along with the strange dreamlike quality of the experience.

When the film ends and the actors all take a bow, you are jolted back into reality and wonder whether everything you have seen as been part of the fantasy of the leading actress or whether the director is simply reminding us of the artificial nature of film and by implication, the illusions of the roles we choose to play in "real" life. The joy of this film is that it is so hard to draw conclusions and there could be endless debates over what it means.

Ethel is a young actress who has grown up in a difficult household, her mother has mental health issues and has an ongoing "relationship" with a previous lover who is violent and aggressive, her father (or perhaps stepfather) is ineffectual yet caring. She dances naked for a living and only just scrapes by.

She manipulates her way into an interview for a part in a film based on Dostoyevsky's "The Possessed", even though she has little acting experience. As she becomes more involved in the film the director seems to take a shine to her and puts her in the lead role, they also develop a wild relationship, which has equal elements of lust, ambition and abuse.

As the filming continues, it seems that the various members of the cast lose touch with reality and the very themes explored in the film begin to play out in real life. "The Possessed" is about the use of violence to achieve political ends and

is both a critique of the violent left and the ineptitude of the conservative right and aristocracy and these themes begin to play out in the lives of the actors playing in "The Possessed". Intrigue abounds as a political assassination occurs and nobody is who they seem.

This is a beautiful looking film filled with colour and texture. It always keeps your attention and is constantly intriguing, you are never sure what is going on and it is also peppered

with eroticism and nakedness, which gives a very "Euro" feel to the experience. It explores lots of different themes within the larger discourse. For example, Ethel dances naked for a photographer to make a regular income.

After many sessions of extremely wild and beautiful dances, the photographer is so aroused he has a heart attack. However, when she looks at the photos they all show her without her head. It is such a potent examination of objectification and the way in which women are be reduced to mere "body parts".

Throughout the film such motifs are used to discuss all manner of ideas and "La Femme Public Publique" really could be used as a the basis for discussions over a long period !

The Mondo Vision release of "La Femme Public Publique" is nothing short of superb.

It is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.66:1 and enhanced for widescreen Television and the clarity of the film cannot be faulted. The colours are scrumptious and I did not notice any damage to the print whatsoever.

The soundtrack is excellent; there is the original French Dolby Digital Mono track and a Stereo Dolby Digital Track with optional, white subtitles in English. The subtitles are clear and easy to follow.

La Femme Public Publique is superb cinema; it is a visual feast while also offering an intelligent and thoughtful plot. It is not an "easy" film, but will make you think about, debate and consider what you have seen. I consider this a significant work which at last has been made available in a top notch edition. While this is a US release it is all regions NTSC.

La Femme Public Publique features:
Digitally Restored Transfer Mastered In High Definition Progressive Video (Approved by Director Andrzej Zulawski)

Feature Length Audio Commentary With Director Andrzej Zulawski And Writer Daniel Bird
Exclusive New Video Interview With Director Andrzej Zulawski
Theatrical Trailer
DVD-ROM Content
Image Gallery
24 page Booklet featuring an essay specially written for the package by Daniel Bird

Mondo Vision

Web: <http://www.mondo-vision.com>

Madame O Synopsis Films All Region NTSC DVD

Madame O was released in 1967 and was directed by Seiichi Fukuda and written by Tomomi Tsukasa. It certainly would have been considered quite confronting for the period.



Madame O is quite a unique film in that while it has a large amount of sex; it is not standard exploitation fare, it is a film which has strong character development, powerful performances from all involved and innovative cinematography including an unusual combination of both black and white and colour footage.

Much of the film is told in a detached voiceover; Saeko explains her life and actions and narrates her experiences creating a third person view of what is occurring.

This reinforces her cold and revengeful behaviour. It also becomes more significant as we realize this story must have been told in retrospect.

Saeko was a young, innocent sixteen year old girl when she was raped by three boys. Not only



Saeko gets to work “cleaning” !

does she become pregnant but contracts syphilis. Rather than receiving sympathy and support, her father accuses her of leading the boys on. He keeps her isolated from men from that time onwards and this only reinforces her view that men are violent and evil.

Many years later she has become a highly respected doctor in her field, however she has an abiding hatred of men.

At night she prowls the street for men eager for sex, she brings them home and then carefully cuts their arms with a scalpel infecting them with syphilis, she then uses an injection to make sure she is not pregnant.

As her practise expands she takes on a new doctor named Teakow, he is dedicated and helpful. However, she has a problem; she is regularly fainting and getting morning sickness.

She realizes that one of her nightly escapades has left her pregnant. In a bizarre scene she attempts to terminate the pregnancy herself but faints during the procedure, Teakow finds her the next morning and completes the termination.

At first she suspects he will try and blackmail her and so she offers him money, however, it seems he is in love with her and they develop a passionate relationship.

Sadly, things do not go as planned. One of the men from Saeko's past sees her in a club and attempts to blackmail her for infecting him.

After she tries to poison him and he attacks her with a knife, she kills him and disposes of his body in acid. Teakow sees the killing and yet tells her he still loves her and marries her anyway.

But is Teakow everything he seems? What are his true motives ?

This is a quirky and unusual film marked by some very superior use of black and white and colour cinematography and a very funky score which ranges from Jazz to classical.

The violence in the film is actually quite understated, it is amazing how much you can infer using changes in music, shadows, the interchange between black and white and colour and a voice over.

The climax is unexpected and there is all manner of betrayal and treachery, it seems no one can be trusted. It is a rather nice twist and adds quite a bit to the movie.

This really is quite a fascinating visual experience which is presented in a high quality wide-screen edition.

There is minimal damage to the print and the sound is very clear and in English. Yes, it would have been nice to have a Japanese track with subtitles, but we can't have everything with these rare gems !

Synapse Films

Web: <http://www.synapse-films.com>

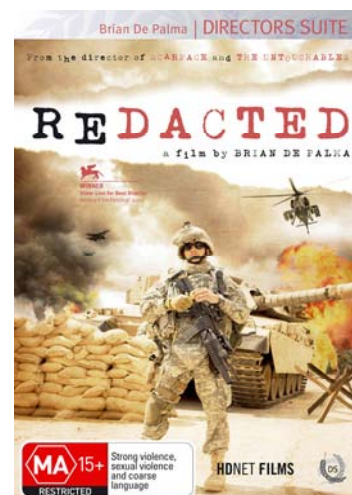
Saeko on one of her nightly encounters of sex and revenge, this one, however, will come back and haunt her !



Redacted Brian de Palma Madman Entertainment 2008 R4 DVD

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Brian de Palma has set out in this film to reconstruct an incident in March 2006 in Mahmudiyah, Iraq, when a U.S. soldier raped a girl and murdered her family.



The story involves a group of soldiers manning an unimportant checkpoint, and is told in a semi-documentary form using (re-enacted) clips from a soldier's video camera, a visiting news team's footage, and TV footage from Iraqi insurgents.

The style is effective. The soldier's own film particularly shows the day to day boredom of manning the checkpoint under constant tension and scorching heat, unappreciated by the locals who don't even speak English and treat the soldiers with reserve.

The soldiers are a fairly rough bunch, ranging from the soldier with the camera who wants to use his pay to go to a film college, to homicidal rednecks who appear to enjoy being able to brutalize and kill people.

There are few breaks in the daily boring routine, apart from when the sergeant sits on an improvised explosive device or when a confused driver who doesn't understand their hand signals is machine gunned when he doesn't stop at the checkpoint.

A pregnant woman dies in the shooting, but the soldier's reaction is unthinking happiness that he has now got his first kill.

In the soldiers' minds the local people are something less than human, so it is not surprising that a



Still from Redacted © HDNET Films 2007

small group sets out to rape a young woman who regularly goes through their checkpoint. Everyone in the family is murdered. Insurgents then kidnap and kill one of the soldiers in reprisal.

Apart from highlighting the problem of controlling the soldiers, there seems to be little point in the film. It has won major awards, but does it really have anything new to say?

The Mahmudiyah incident was widely reported at the time, so de Palma is not revealing secrets. The lowering of standards for the military is likewise no secret, and with the lowering of standards comes a lessening of ethics.

Boredom between actions leads to mischief, and this is also not new. Those who see it as an anti-U.S. film are, I think, reading too much into it.

I can, however, see the film as a powerful commentary on the problems of keeping garrison forces in a foreign environment. It is not, as some would think (and as de Palma possibly intended), an anti-war film either.

There are no heroes on either side. Similar atrocities have occurred in war down through the centuries, and many, like this one, were not in battle. NoGun-Ri in Korea and My Lai in Vietnam are only two examples where U.S. troops were in the wrong, so Mahmudiyah is not an isolated incident.

Perhaps the film should be seen as a reminder that “our boys over there” can be just as ruthless and wantonly homicidal as the men they are fighting, to counterpoint the jingoistic uncritical patriotism that is all over the Internet.

In spite of this, it is still an extremely good film of a soldier’s daily life in Iraq. Because it is so hard to draw conclusions from the film, it seems a little vague and undefined, but isn’t that what the Iraq war really is?

At least we get to see a pretty good re-enactment of the military life, and perhaps this helps us understand why atrocities like Mahmudiyah happen.

Schoolboy Crush TLA Releasing R1 DVD

Schoolboy Crush is not as the time suggests. While we may think it is a film filled with lurid and wild school sex and fun times – an American film with this title certainly would be – it is actually a rather melancholic reflection on love, loss and life.



Softcore action in Schoolboy Crush





Roughhouse competition Schoolboy Crush Style !

As with any Japanese film with young men, the boys are beautiful and androgynous and the same sex school seems to exist in a world in which woman seem to be non-existent. You realize do not realize it until later in the film, this is a world where the masculine and feminine roles are both played by the boys and all sex roles are explored in same sex relationships. (except for a few teachers who mention wives etc)

At times the film seems to move into soap opera territory as the boys all compete and manipulate against each other in a melodrama, but on the whole I think it is very effective in its exploration of the various emotional territories it covers.

Teacher Aoi has just been dumped by his boyfriend and decides to dream the night away with a very beautiful male prostitute. Sora is not only beautiful but sensitive and understanding.

However, the next day when Aoi returns to work he finds the Sora is the new student at the boys boarding school where he teaches. This is a disaster for Aoi as not only is Sora now in his classes but his mobile number is in Sora's phone.

Aoi seems lost and unsure how to deal with the sexually precocious Sora and every time he makes a move to neutralize the risk from Sora, Sora is a step ahead.

Slowly, life at the school heats up, Sora sneaks out at night to work his trade and Aoi becomes more and more paranoid.

Sora regularly rings Aoi, at first teasing him and then to ask him for advice. What Aoi does not seem to realize is that Sora has deep emotions for him.

The danger, however, is that Ichiyu has already recorded the phone numbers from Sora's phone and knows he has had extra curricula contact with Aoi.

Sora's relationship with Ichiyu, his roommate is significant. Sora does not realize how alienated Ichiyu really is. While he is brilliant academically he is emotionally inexperienced and when they have a small misunderstanding the results are disastrous. Ichiyu is clearly obsessed with Sora and cannot deal with his emotions being rejected. He feels that not only has he lost the affection he craves but that his position in the school has been destroyed. He was once the dux of the school, now he is academically failing. In addition that the other boys are now victimizing him and Sora is not there to protect him.

Sora is more nuanced than one may expect from a male prostitute. While money is very important to him, his motivations are clearly far more complex than immediately apparent at the start of the film.

As the plot unfolds we find he is the adopted son of a rich family and is only really wanted for his looks and brains, the family's biological son, being, well, a bit below par.

He plies his trade to pay a detective to try and find his missing family. In many ways he is a lost young man trying to use whatever he has to survive in a world from which he is alienated. While he is comfortable with his own sexuality, he also understands how to use it as a tool for survival and to manipulate others.

While there is quite a bit of flesh on show, the movie is not driven by sex but more by emotion and relationships, it is a surprisingly intimate look at the emotional life of young men and while, at times bordering on a melodrama is rather a nice work of Japanese cinema.

**Scorsese: My Voyage through Italian Cinema
7 DVD Set
Umbrella Entertainment 2008**

Scorsese: My Voyage through Italian Cinema is a superb way to explore the world of Italian film. It opens with what is arguably the very best documentary ever made on Italian Cinema, My Voyage to Italy. It is Martin Scorsese's personal journey through the films that influenced him in his career. "I saw these movies. They had a powerful effect on me. You should see them." It is such a simple message. It makes no justification for his choices, he doesn't pack his commentary with high end film criticism or interviews with film reviewers or critics, he simply tells it as he sees it.

Offering insight on the style, staging, technique, political context, and cinematic influence of each film. It is an incredibly personal documentary exploring his family's love of cinema and how it all began with watching classics on a small black and white television and how he developed his own understanding of a range of unique movies he came to love. It is from this appreciation of these classic works of cinema that his own cinematic style evolved. Throughout the documentary he includes extended clips of each of the films with his own narration.

The films of Roberto Rossellini make up for about half the films discussed in the documentary, focusing on his significant role in Italian cinema and cinema history, while other directors mentioned include Vittorio de Sica, Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni.

It is very comprehensive documentary coming in at four hours and is presented in the first two DVDs of this set. Many timid souls may think a four hour documentary which be boring or find it

hard to sustain the interest of the viewer, however, Scorsese's personal observations, intriguing commentary and erudite inside perspective really sustains it right the way through.

To supplement this introduction Umbrella has included a series of highly significant Italian films to round out the package.

La Terra Trema is Luchino Visconti's haunting vision of a peasant uprising is his purest excursion into neorealism and a masterpiece of post-war Italian cinema.

I Vitelloni was a major influence on Martin Scorsese's Mean Streets, Federico Fellini's autobiographical comedy-drama follows the frustrated small-town lives of a group of aimless, promiscuous young men.

The Bicycle Thief was awarded an honorary Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and regularly voted one of the greatest films of all time, Vittorio De Sica's masterpiece is a harrowing portrait of loss and depravation in post-war Rome.

L'Avventura was the winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival, Michelangelo Antonioni's breakthrough film, the first in his 'alienation' trilogy, stars the beautiful Monica Vita (La Notte) in her greatest role.

The set ends with the startling 8½ where Federico Fellini casts his alter-ego, Marcello Mastroianni (La Dolce Vita), in the role of a frustrated director, creating what is considered the greatest-ever movie about film-making. Winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film (1963).

This is a superb set which not only offers a truly encyclopaedic documentary on Italian Cinema by a master filmmaker but includes a selection of the films which he considers significant.



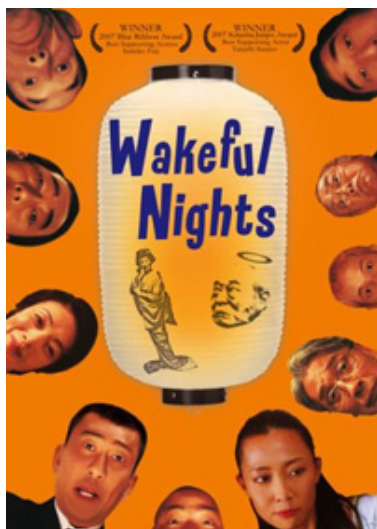
Monica Vitti in My Journey to Italy

Wakeful Nights AnimEigo R1 DVD

The Hardest Night (Nezu no ban) released by AnimEigo as Wakeful Nights is a raucous celebration of life, death, sex and everything in-between. Based on a form of Japanese storytelling known as Rakugo it explores the lives of a Master Storyteller and his students through the celebrations or “Wakes” held as they die. This is certainly not a morbid affair though it is surprisingly touching; the wakes are events for celebrations of life and for memories. In Wakeful Nights we see some of the most amusing Wakes you will ever experience, all I can hope is that when I die my wake could be as fun as these !

Rakugo master Shomantei is on his deathbed, his wife and his pupils are gathered around him when the doctor advises he only has a very short time to live. The most senior student asks the master is there anything he would like before he passes on. The master's voice is shaky and unclear, but they think he has asked to see a “soto” which means Honey Pot or Vagina ! After all manner of debates one of the students convinces his wife Shigeko to fulfil the master's last wishes. She climbs on the hospital bed and lifts her skirt high taking pride in that she has satisfied the master's last wishes. However,

Shigeko proudly shows the Master her honey-pot !



there is a problem, he actually said he wanted “soto” which means to go outside !!! The joy of Wakeful Night is the constant witty use of language and intelligent humour. But be aware that much of it is filthy, dirty and downright perverse.

Throughout the film we are treated to every possible word play, embarrassing memories and outrageous recollections, a couple that come to mind are the loss of virginity to a manta-ray and the master's alcohol fuelled diarrhoea exploding on a railway station.

As various wakes unfold from the oldest student through to the master's wife, each one becomes a more raucous celebration than the last; with great stories, wild humour and a true commemoration of life. There is a good balance of pathos and humour, many of the scenes are deeply moving and a powerful expression of loss and grief, yet at the same time there is such an acceptance that death is a part of life. For me this is the beauty of Wakeful Nights – life is accepted as it is. There is birth, sex, love and loss, bodily functions and death. Nothing is considered unworthy of acceptance. While there are various customs and occasional “Buddhist Chants”, the emphasis is on the reality of life, not solemn prayers about the future and crying and gnashing of teeth. There is such honesty about the humour in this film that it makes it a truly powerful entertainment experience.

There are some astounding set pieces in the film including the wake of the master where they dance with his dead body through the night and the wake for his wife, where they have a dirty song competition celebrating her early life as a geisha.

The presentation from AnimEigo is impressive; one of the best options is to have a white explanation subtitle which gives you a solid outline of some of the nuances of the humour (they appear at the top of the scene as required) and yellow and green subtitles across the bottom. Using both yellow and green allow the flow of dialogue to appear much more natural than simple one colour subtitles.

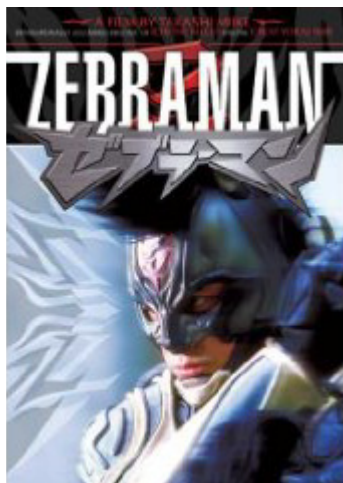
This allows you to really appreciate the complexity of the humour while enjoying the flow of the film with its many songs, excellent plot and superb characters.

Zebraman Tokyo Shock Media Blasters R1 DVD

Takashi Miike is well known for his unusual approach to cinema, many of his films are marked by violence, sex and extremes of behaviour. At the same time he also produces unusual films which are hard to categorize such as *The Great Yokai War* and *Zebraman*. *Zebraman* is a quirky and eccentric sort of film, which has lots of humour and comedy and a very unusual storyline. The violence is fairly artificial and reminds me more of "Ghost Busters" than of the violence normally associated with Miike, however, there are certainly some darker moments.

The story is the tale of Ichikawa Shin'ichi, he is a supervisor at a local school and doesn't seem to have much of a career trajectory. He is routinely degraded by staff and students alike and his home life is no better. His son is regularly bullied and beaten due to his ineffectiveness as a father and his daughter, who has recently come of age, has become very sexually active with a penchant for the criminal class. His wife seems to play no role in his life whatever and is having an affair.

His way of dealing with the world is to retreat into his favourite superhero series, *Zebraman*. It was a second rate series which was ridiculed by most, but Ichikawa loved it and cherished the seven episodes which were shown on TV. He



makes himself a Zebraman outfit and even fantasizes about being a superhero.

The city in which they live is plagued with reports of strange events, rapes and murders. At first these seem to be simply local crimes, but soon a defence department investigation is underway as they bear the hallmarks of being extra terrestrial in origin. As the killings become more extreme, the bodies which are discovered seem to be oozing a green substance.



Zebraman in all his glory !

Ichikawa wishes to fight against crime but lacks the confidence to do so until he finds out that a disabled child who has transferred to his school also shares his love of *Zebraman*. Somehow a strange bond is formed and through their combined belief Ichikawa is transformed into *Zebraman*. He now takes to fighting the accelerating crime rate which is caused by these alien life forms taking over human bodies. In a rather amusing scene a bus of children become "possessed" by these forms and run amok and use baseball bats to demolish a local market stall.

This is a quirky, eccentric and at times sentimental film filled with humour, comedy and super hero crime fighting. The transformation of Ichikawa from the *Zebraman* of dreams to the real *Zebraman* by the power of belief, of course, offers the simple message that we can achieve what we dream of. At times I felt the film became a little too mawkish and lost track of its central premise, at nearly two hours I think better editing may have fixed this.

The acting is solid; the plot sends up every possible science fiction and superhero story (as well as many horror and cult films). In the end it is a lot of fun, not taking itself too seriously and offering lots of laughs and action.

Zebraman Vs Crabman



THINKING TIME!



BBC The History of World War II BBC Warner R1 DVD Set

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

In 1975 Thames Television released its epic "The World At War", a 26-part series of such high quality and interest that it was widely mistaken for a BBC production. If you are expecting this DVD set to be an update to "The World At War", it isn't. It is a collection of documentaries and series produced by the BBC over the last fifteen or so years. There is no serious attempt at a timeline of World War 2 and the whole series is very Europe-oriented. I find this to be a bit limiting compared with "The World At War". Some important areas of the war have been completely ignored or seriously abbreviated.

It also features a number of "dramatizations", something I have a bit of trouble with in a serious historical documentary. "Dunkirk" is a complete "docu-drama", and in spite of its quality I am not sure how relevant it is to a historical set like this. Unfortunately in recent years there has been a trend towards dramatizations to make up for simple lack of other content, so I guess we are stuck with them.

A word of warning. The set has been produced (often illegally) in many countries. Be sure the version you propose to buy will work on your DVD player, unless you have an all-regions player. The cover and subtitles will vary depending on the country of origin, too (mine was subtitled in Japanese, with a different cover).

Those minor criticisms aside, the set is superb. The quality is good, the interviews skilful, relevant and well-made, the research thorough and detailed as you would expect from the BBC. The more recent DVDs of the set are in 16:9 ratio. Even the oldest parts from 1989 have come up well. Some clips appear to have been lightly enhanced, but they still keep the period feel of genuine footage. The sound is excellent

throughout except for special tracks like speeches by Stalin, where the quality accurately reflects the sound recording equipment of the time.



Let's have a look at the contents.

"The Nazis: A Warning From History". 1997, 6 episodes. This is a particularly useful set. It examines the rise to power of the Nazi party and the circumstances that allowed it to be acceptable to Germany.

"The Road To War" 1989, 4 episodes. The politics involved as Britain, Italy, the USA and Japan became involved in the war.

"Dunkirk" 2004, 3 episodes. A dramatized version of the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk.

"Battle Of the Atlantic" 2002, 3 episodes. The Atlantic convoys and the U-Boat war. It contains some good propaganda footage, but was probably done better in the NBC series "Victory At Sea".

"War of the Century" 1999, 4 episodes. The best coverage I have seen of the war in Russia, including the dreadful effects on the civilian population.

"Horrors Of The East" 2000, 2 episodes. A rather hasty look at another important war theatre, with passing mentions of India and Burma. This was covered better in "The Road to Iwo Jima".

"Battlefields" 2001, 4 Episodes. Some of the significant battle areas of the war, including the

firebombing of German cities by the RAF.

"D-Day: Reflections of Courage" 2004, 2 episodes. The lead up to D-Day and the events of the day. Docu-drama.

"Auschwitz: Inside The Nazi State" 2005, 6 Episodes. 16:9 ratio. The development of Hitler's Final Solution and its implementation. This series is perhaps a little overdone, rather than just thorough. If some of the dramatizations were cut out it would be more manageable without losing any of its authority.

"D-Day To Berlin" 2004, 3 Episodes, 16:9. This is one of the better documentaries following the course of the fight towards Germany and some of the significant battles along the way. I was pleased to see Operation Market Garden included, where the fight for prestige between Montgomery and the U.S. generals led to a military disaster.

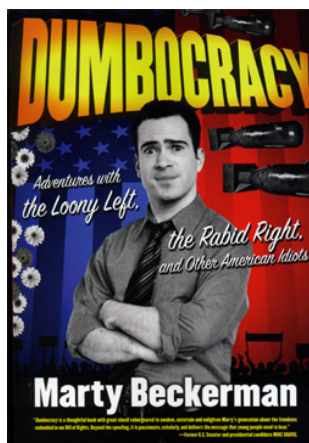
Despite the small deficiencies of the DVD set, if you are looking for a history of World War 2, it is worth buying for its detailed coverage of so many areas. It complements "The World At War" really well, but is a superb production in its own right.

Dumbocracy
Marty Beckerman
Disinformation
Press 2008
Distributed by:
Tower Books
Australia

Dumbocracy is a confronting look at the true state of modern politics, left and right. It is also an indictment of the laziness of a nation that refuses to think for itself and has allowed extremists to take hold.

It was originally scheduled for publication in 2006 by a major publisher and called "Retard Nation: America's sexiest young journalist exposes the bastardly forces keeping you stupid". The publisher balked at the content and the book languished for some time until Disinformation decided to bring it to publication.

I am very glad they did as I believe this is a very



significant work of journalism which bluntly, crassly and without much subtlety takes aim at the inane discourse that passes for politics within the United States. The book opens with the marvelous statement "Opinions are like genitals: if you force others to swallow yours, something is seriously wrong with you." From there on in, everything is fair game.

Abortion, extreme feminists, the right wing, Christian conservatives, Jewish nationalists, anti drug and anti fast food campaigners, the list goes on. In many ways he is a bit like "Penn and Teller" (of Bullshit fame) in print, but only rudier. His language is rough, his phraseology potentially offensive, yet he equally attacks all sides, George Bush is "King Retard" while Bill Clinton is President Blow Job, no one is spared.

At the same time do not be put off by the inflammatory rhetoric; this is a very well researched book. Beckerman spent years interviewing, attending political campaigns and rallies, he even travelled to Israel to gain other perspectives on the issues. He provides a surprising amount of carefully checked information on everything from abortion to safe sex, smoking to fast food and these facts make you do a double-take and rethink the positions that have been so carefully manipulated by various political factions.

Dumbocracy is divided into three sections. The first examines the sheer unreasonableness of the modern political landscape and includes many examples of the utter insanity of true believers.

The second section examines the rising tide of Puritanism looking at everything from adult products to smoking and fast food.

The last section is more personal and discusses his experience travelling to Israel for a Global Summit for Young Jewish Innovators.

You will find Dumbocracy challenging, shocking, perhaps offensive and on most occasions incredibly refreshing. So many times reading this book I thought to myself how marvellous it was to find an author who sees beyond the simple dichotomy of left and right and tells it as it is, calling a spade a spade and smelling bullshit when he comes across it.

He stands firm in his call for us to think for ourselves, taking nothing on faith and believing no one, I can think of no better position to work from.

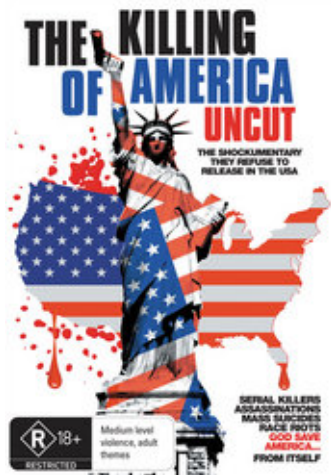
**The Killing of
America Uncut
R4 DVD
Beyond
Entertainment**

I remember when I first saw the Killing of America on Video and I was shocked, very shocked. It left me unsure of how much this show was a genuine exploration of violence and serial killers in America and how much was just "shockumentary". What worried me most was whether it "crossed the line" and sensationalized the subject. I am still not sure. I am not adverse to violence in film but this film seemed to use a flood of violent images to overpower the viewer and I am unconvinced this is necessary to tell the story they have set out to tell.

In the wake of the success of Faces of Death, The Killing of America was written by Leonard Shrader and his wife Chieko, he also directed. It was made for the Japanese market where Faces of Death was a huge success. The major difference is that where Faces of Death used obviously faked footage mixed with newsreel content, this is all terrifyingly real. The researchers on this film must have been quite a team; they located some of the rarest newsreel footage, documents, stills and audio content in this field ever brought together into a film.

It opens with a mentally ill man shot dead on the street and works on from there to be an indictment of crime in the US. Extensive coverage is given both to major crimes including serial killers such as Charles Whitman, John Gacy, David Berkowitz, Charles Manson and Ted Bundy as well as to random killings, robberies etc. The footage is offered with a well structured commentary which attempts to put the information into context.

This is very shocking stuff and I will be surprised how many people watch it until the end. It is like a dark news report that just does not stop, there does not seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel and the footage just gets worse and worse from the Bundy Court case to Jim Jones and beyond.



That being said, this is a remarkable piece of documentary filmmaking and while certainly controversial, it is surprisingly well made, has a very professional presentation and brings together footage which is unique and has not been seen anywhere else.

However, be warned, this is not for the faint of heart.

**Plagues and
Pleasures of the
Salton Sea
Tilapea Film
All NTSC DVD**

Once known as the "California Riviera", the Salton Sea is now seen as one of America's worst ecological disasters yet few know it's strange and intriguing history nor have they experienced the eccentrics which now populate its shores.



The modern history of the Salton Sea began in 1901 when the California Development Company, seeking to realize the Imperial Valley's potential for agricultural growth, without much forethought for possible consequences, dug huge irrigation canals from the Colorado River. However, soon these canals became heavily silted and the inhabitants of the valley became concerned over possible flooding. Engineers then created various other canals in the Western bank of the Colorado to permit more water flow. Since the likely effect of these canals was not especially well considered, they caused a major flood in which the Colorado river flowed into the valley destroying much of the infrastructure but creating the Salton Sea.

Rather than evaporating the sea was fed from runoff from surrounding farms and became a 1950's Mecca for water sports, fishing and living the high life. It developed into a resort town and many believed it would rival Palm Springs. However, the Salton Sea was hit by a range of disasters which soon decimated the once thriving community. There were floods, hurricanes and then the salinity increased in the Sea until the fish and birds began to die. There is much debate about why this occurred including rumours of waste from Mexico, increased chemical loads from surrounding farms to the simple problem of not enough fresh water coming into

the system. In any event the Salton Sea and its community has been left to a few eccentrics living in a strange post apocalyptic world. Congressman Sonny Bono dedicated himself to trying to save the region but after his unexpected demise in a skiing accident there was lots of goodwill but little real action. His wife continues his work and various plans are in place, but years later the Salton Sea still looks and smells like a wasteland. Each year teams must work to control the spread of bacteria to stop the major die off of birds which now have no other ocean habitat to use and while it has major environmental significance, it seems governmental departments have been slow to act due to the high cost and perhaps due to a belief the water can be best used somewhere else.

Plagues and Pleasures of the Salton Sea is narrated by John Waters and is part environmental documentary, part journey to the twilight zone. The inhabitants of the Salton Sea are a strange bunch from a strange religious zealot building a mountain for God, a Hungarian revolutionary called Hunky Daddy, a nudist, various elderly folk who still seem to see the Sea as it was in its prime and a developing ghetto. There are still those who feel it is at the “cusp” of something big and are promoting the land in the vain hope of making a fortune.

This is a superb combination of history, environmental issues, humour, pathos and cynicism. There is a melancholy feel too as you look at what the Salton Sea was and see what forty years can do to a thriving community.



Leonard and his Sacred Mountain

The film has been masterfully made with a superb score by “The Friends of Dean Martinez” and the dry wit of John Waters. It includes both the theatrical release and a shorter environmental edition.

The extras are really quite something. There is a great piece on Leonard, the strange religious fanatic who is creating a mountain for god from Adobe and loads of paint. The original Sixties Miracle in the Desert Salton Sea Promotional film. A nice short on The Friends of Dean Martinez and the development of the score to the film, a very short look at skateboarding in the empty pools of Salton Sea and a surreal short called LSD a go go on LSD and the CIA ton Sea Promotional film. which only seems connected to the main doco by the fact that Sonny Bono is in it !

Web: <http://www.saltonseadoc.com/>

Save Me First Run Pictures R1 DVD

Save Me is an independent film that stars Chad Allen as a troubled, drug-addicted gay man named Mark who is sent to a Christian ex-gay ministry called Genesis House, where a married couple attempts to change the sexual orientation of those who attend, or at least convince them to embrace celibacy.



The film opens with a series of scenes which juxtapositions the opposing worldviews. Mark is shown indulging in drugs, sex and partying, while on the other side we see a Church service. While this is a film made by gay people attempting to create a dialogue with the Christian church on the issue of homosexuality I have some problems with the film from the outset.

The Church presented is clearly an evangelical Church and the Church ministry is an ex-gay ministry, this is how the Christian debate is framed, progressive pro gay Churches are ignored.

At the same time the gay men shown have



Mark in Save Me

problems with drugs and sex addiction, hardly representative of the gay community at large.

If we move past the first scenes, we then get a more interesting presentation of an ex-gay ministry with its various participants. These range from party boy Mark to various others. The married couple running the ministry is shown as very human with Ted being a former alcoholic and his wife being haunted by the death of her gay son. The methods used at Genesis range from group therapy to prayer and an emphasis on regaining training sex role i.e. men becoming more masculine.

I must admit I have problems with this film. It has been made by gay men trying to offer an understanding of the ex-gay movement and create more tolerance between evangelical Christians and the gay movement and this, I believe, is totally misguided. The reality is that the ex-gay movement has caused a vast number of suicides and untold emotional damage.

It has been repudiated by the professional bodies representing both psychiatry and psychology in the USA, UK and Australia. There is no evidence that sexual orientation can be changed anymore than prayer can heal a broken leg – the ex-gay movement is not only stupid but dangerous. To try and create a dialogue is like trying to create a dialogue with witchdoctors about medicine.

As an atheist I have little time for religion, but I am more than willing to accept that some gay and lesbian people wish to hold onto their faith – for these people there are a wide range of accepting gay and lesbian Churches and movements. In addition, for those who have problems with drug use and sex addiction, there are vari-

ous highly successful psychological programs – sexual orientation has nothing to do with such problems, they can happen to anyone.

I have felt for some time that the gay community at large is becoming a little too accommodating to those who place the community at risk. While Save Me does make it clear that homophobic prejudices reinforced by Church teaching are the heart of the ex-gay movement and there is a discovery of the bonds of male love outside the restrictive worldview of Genesis House at the end of the film, it still gives the ex-gay movement far more sympathy that it deserves. In my mind it deserves ridicule and contempt and little else...

Ship of No Return The Final Voyage of the Gustloff In German with clear subtitles Madman 2009

This is a two-part made-for-TV dramatization of history's greatest shipping tragedy. It is set in the closing days of the Second World War.



The Russians are advancing steadily through Germany. Refugees are flooding the port of Gotenhafen in the hope of passage on a ship to the safer parts of Germany.

The only remaining ship to get them out is the Wilhelm Gustloff, a pre-War cruise ship. Currently it houses over 1000 naval personnel, destined for the U-boat crews. As a naval ship it has its own naval captain, the arrogant and inexperienced Captain Petri.

As a civilian ship, it also has a civilian captain, the indecisive and less-than-competent Captain Johannsen. Into this mix is thrown the young merchant navy captain Hellmut Kehding, appointed by the Transport Board to get the refugees out. The tensions between these three as well played out as the date for departure arrives.

Kehding is viewed with contempt by Petri, who believes that Kehding is a coward for not joining the Navy.



conscripted for service if he is discovered.

There is the corrupt Nazi party official who has smuggled prostitutes on board and is living it up while he still can. These all increase the tension on Kehding.

He finds it increasingly difficult to maintain order, satisfy his superiors, and put up with the petty demands on him caused by sheer human nature in a time of crisis. The situation escalates until Kehding is ordered off his own bridge.

The port is rife with Russian spies who are well aware that sinking the *Gustloff* will be a propaganda victory – the ship was launched on Hitler's birthday as a cruise ship for German workers, and tomorrow is Hitler's birthday.

There are traitors both in the town and on the ship. Kehding's brother is a member of German Security, and in these tense and desperate times he has everyone under suspicion including Kehding himself.

There are subplots running through the story. Kehding's girlfriend is also in the city, looking after refugees. She is under suspicion because she came from an area now occupied by the Russians, as is her cousin, the *Gustloff*'s radio operator.

There is a young German family fleeing the Russians. The father is lost somewhere in the war, the son is now of military age and will be

Kehding gets the refugees on board against the objections of the navy, and must somehow get the unescorted ship to safety at Kiel. The Russians are waiting and the ship is torpedoed. Thousands of people died.

ZDF is the production arm of the German ZDF Television Network. They are highly regarded, and if this is an example of their work then that regard is well earned. The film is technically of high quality, the sub-plots do not get in the way of the main storyline, the characterisations add to the story and help explain it rather than just pad it out.

The desperation of the refugees is well brought out, as is the disintegration of order in the chaos of a war being lost. ZDF managed to secure the services of Heinz Schon, a survivor, to ensure the authenticity.

Producer Norbert Sauer said "We were united by the desire to make an anti-war film which does justice to the victims of the war without concealing the responsibility of the perpetrators.

I hope this film succeeds in doing just that." He did succeed. Although comparisons with *Titanic* are unavoidable, I think this is by far the more powerful film because of its wartime setting and its sympathetic coverage of the refugees.

The immense sadness of the floating bodies is not drawn out.



We are left with a sense of outrage that the people who caused it all were not brought to justice due to the expediencies of wartime, and a certain sympathy for young Kehding who did his best for humanitarian reasons but was betrayed by those in power.

The film took five years to make, and when first shown it had a massive 23 percent of the viewing audience. It won a DIVA award as the most successful German TV movie of 2008. Madman will release the DVD in Australia on 18 February 2009. The DVD will also contain a 50-minute documentary on the disaster.

ZDF Enterprises

Australian Distributor:

Madman Entertainment 2009

The Story of Flight

Prod. Tim Exell, Jules Gammont

Green Umbrella Sport & Leisure

Australian Distributor:

Duke Home Entertainment

Web: <http://www.duke.com.au>

Reviewer:

Bob Estreich

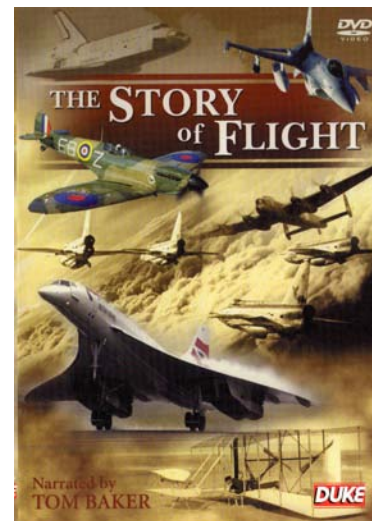
This documentary summarises the development of aircraft from the Wright Brothers up to the Space Shuttle. It's a lot to cover in 110 minutes, but the film manages to do it really well. It was made largely in Britain and is a bit Europe-oriented but this is reasonable considering that this is where many major aircraft developments occurred. The influence of two World Wars spurred this on.

There is a remarkable amount of historic footage, mostly original, not cleaned up. This is supplemented by stunning colour footage of some of the few remaining restored historic aircraft at air shows and collections. Watching these flying machines take to the air gives you a good understanding of just how flimsy they were, and you can only admire the bravery of the men who flew and later fought in them.

Civil aviation is not ignored. Many of the early passengers were as brave as the fighting men to take to the air in these craft. Yet flying proved popular, even as a private sport, and the quality of the aircraft grew.

By the outbreak of World War 2 the Air Forces of the combatants were largely being modern-

ized with all-metal aircraft and a level of armament that a WW1 pilot could only have dreamed about. Again there is a lot of historic footage supplemented by film of restored examples. The rise of the jet aircraft is covered in some detail.



The coverage of Cold War aircraft is particularly good. This area is often ignored, but it included the Korean War where jet aircraft combat techniques were developed, and the important spy plane missions.

The tremendous developments in post war civil aviation are well covered, with some magnificent photography of the various Airbus models. It serves as a good reminder that not all the world's airliners are built by Boeing.

The film finishes with the magnificent but incredibly expensive Concorde, and some shots of the Space Shuttle – the airliner of the future?

This documentary is designed for entertainment. The narration is by Tom Baker (one of the many Doctor Whos in case you recognize the name). His easy delivery does not sound at all pompous, a fault of some British documentaries, and he suits the style of the film well.

The DVD also contains as an extra a very brief but beautifully filmed homage to the Concorde.

Duke Home Entertainment is a small firm which specialises in inexpensive documentaries. At present their catalogue is mostly motorbikes and cars, including the classic On Any Sunday weekend motor sports series.

Such low-production DVDs tend to disappear quickly from sale, and Duke is to be congratulated for keeping these films available. The Story of Flight, for instance, dates back to 2003. Let's hope that more films of this sort will enter their range.

MAGAZINES IN REVIEW



Electric Sheep Winter Issue (08) Into The White

Electric Sheep's by-line is a "deviant view of cinema" and it certainly never ceases to live up to its publicity.

Every issue surprises, amuses and provokes.

The Winter issue "Into the White" looks at the role of the Antarctic and snow in film and what a fascinating series of articles it offers.

From Werner Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World* which explores the Antarctic as a sort of meditation on natural beauty with an innate criticism of humanity's inane stupidity to an interview with Asif Kapadia on *Far North*.

There is the bizarre savagery of the *Thing* by John Carpenter and an intriguing look as snow in film noir.

Electric Sheep offers articles on Finnish and Icelandic cinema and, of course, discussions of Christmas cinema from Tim Burton to *Slashers*.

This is such a fascinating and interesting subject - while lots of magazines have articles on Xmas, not many actually look at the cinematic significance of the wilderness of the arctic or the symbolic imagery of snow. Electric Sheep always comes up with the goods and never ceases to amaze.

There are also pertinent reviews of significant films and discussions of current film festivals.

There is also an article on *Salo or 120 Days of Sodom* which universally is seen as a controversial and yet highly significant work of cinema but is still banned in many countries including Australia, incredible considering how significant this film is seen to be in the canon of modern cinema.



Electric Sheep once again offers a range of unique content with highly informative features, intelligent and erudite reviews and an approach to cinema which is way beyond the mainstream and is proud to be so !

Wallflower Press

<http://www.wallflowerpress.co.uk/category/electric-sheep>

Girls and Corpses

Web: <http://www.girlsandcorpses.com/>

Girls and Corpses is one of the most outrageous horror magazines ever seen in print. It combines an obsession with corpses in all manner of decay with beautiful girls; every issue is filled with pin-ups of the most unusual form. Articles are always diverse, informative and amusing with everything from serious pieces to gallows humour and political incorrect send-ups. There are comics, reviews, news and interviews.

Girls and Corpses Print Issue #6 Fall

This issue has a Corpse Pilates cover (and this continues as a feature) and a From Here to Eternity (Corpse Version) centrefold. The satirical adverts in this issue are as sharp as usual with full page beauties such as CCC (Corpse Crispy Chicken), Ass Mint and Deathsavers, Bloodweiser, Frozen pork on a stick and lots more.

The interviews are superb including A is for Ackerman which is an extensive interview with Forest Ackerman on Monsters, Science Fiction and just about everything in-between, a solid interview with Eric Pigors of Toxic Toons and a heavy metal interview with Ted von Heiland. But that is just the beginning, there is an interview with Jade Perez on New Age Dolls from



Hell, a film interview with Blake Reigle (Death Beneath the Surface), a great interview on Haunted Houses (a real entertainment market in the US, but not really found in Australia- sadly) and a rather over the top interview with Lucifer Valentine on what could be best described as vomit porn ! Of course all of these are profusely illustrated.

Articles include an interesting piece on Mummification, my life as a mortician, classic TV shows redone as Porn (will Mr.Ed ever be the same again!) and perverse comics such as Beached Whale and various individual cartoons.

Other features include the Putrid family with songs and corpse images, Amateur Corpses of the month and more. This is another action packed issue with lots of bizarre, informative and of course, dead content ! Not forgetting the ladies of course....

Girls and Corpses Print Issue #7 Winter (Latest)

The latest issue has a great Karate Corpse cover and a six poster pull out.

The interviews are again superb; it is impressive that the team at Girls and Corpses can constantly come up with high quality interviews for every issue. Snapshots from Hell is an interview with photographer Jeffrey Scott who produces truly disturbing yet beautiful grotesque images while Love thy Neighbour or take a hit out on them explores the world of the hitman. There is an interview with the musicians of Creeping Cruds , the beautiful but deadly Liana Mendoza – Vampire Diva and Australian rockin' squid Mz.Ann Thropik. As usual Girls and Corpses pack in the interviews, they continue with an interview with Victoria De Mare (who was deemed the 2006 Hollywood Scream Queen) , proprietors of the Museum of Death and Noah Scalin of the Skull A Day Project.

The humour continues with such send up ads as Snuff Magazine (Pinch and Sniff), She Wolf hair removal cream and lots more...There is even an education gem on Posthumous Executions.

The article "Dead in Bed" – Necrophilia in horror



film is superbly researched and one of the first on the subject while Her Shit does Stink is a truly over the top piece on supermodels and shit, among other things. Dawna of the Dead continues the transgressive theme and offers an extensive review of this XXX sex horror classic.

The Hot Zombie chicks comic art is really hot and the Karate Corpse feature carries on the theme from the cover. There are lots of smaller cartoons with a major comic Sam or I.

Girls and Corpses continues to produce the goods. It is an amazing magazine which has more interviews per issue than most publications on the market, it is always profusely illustrated with corpses and girls (of course) and lots of comics, cartoons, satirical content and more. I have never been disappointed with an issue, indeed each one seems to be better than the last !!!

This is a truly a magazine to die for !

Juxtapoz Art & Culture Magazine February 2009

The 97th issue of Juxtapoz, has Mars-1 as the cover story. Mars-1 travelled to new planetarium in San Francisco to explore the stars, learn about exoplanets, and discuss the new body of work he is preparing for his solo show in NYC this month.

There is also an in-depth look into the work of photographer JR, one of the most prolific and multi-leveled artists working today. German duo, Herakut, unveils their newest body of work, Brooklyn's Thomas Keeley makes a lot of something out of nothing, Philippines' Louie Cordero takes comic book admiration to a new level, and Japanese artist, Ryohei Hase, makes some of the most beautiful, detailed art in the world today. And the kings of street art on the web, Wooster Collective, speak of the beauty in their concrete neighbourhood.

Juxtapoz
Web: <http://www.juxtapoz.com/>



Morpheus Tales #3

Issue #3 of Morpheus Tales is on the streets and once again offers and impressive collection of horror, suspense and sci fi tales.

Superbly illustrated with dark and at times confronting art, the stories are all top notch.



For some strange reason (probably due to the edgy art) some booksellers banned volume II as pornographic - so that tells you the editors are doing something right !!!

Issue three also includes a small selection of reviews and a couple of interviews including one with Dave Gentry (who did the cover) which is illustrated with colour images of his art, the other is with author Michael Laimo.

Once again the thing that stands out in regards to Morpheus Tales is the balance between fiction and art, every story is illustrated, sometimes with multiple images and these really create a uniquely visual presence to the magazine that is not found in other "horror" fiction publications.

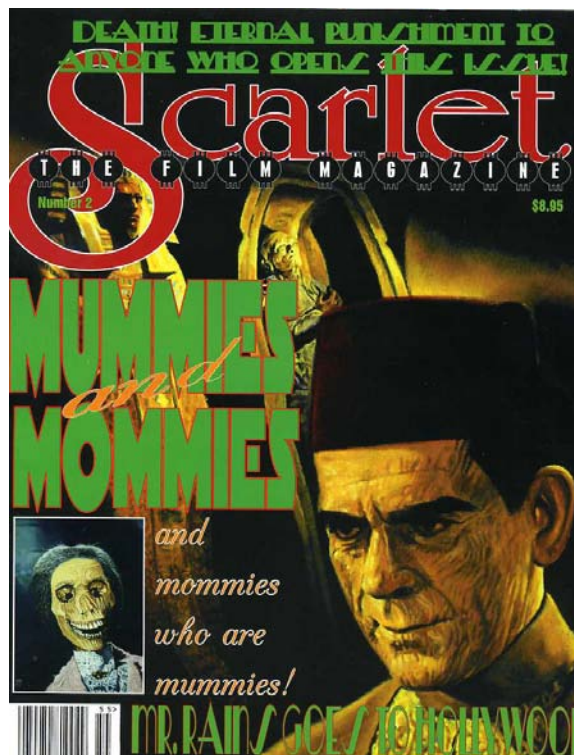
Web: <http://www.morpheustales.com/>

Scarlet Issue 2
The Film Magazine
PO Box 29092
Cleona PA 17042
USA

Paypal Purchase available email:
Email: scarletthefilmmag@yahoo.com

Once again Scarlet stands head and shoulders above many other genre magazines on the market; beautifully produced and illustrated, it is packed with insightful and above all intelligent articles. It is a superb read from cover to cover.

Rather than being focused (read obsessed) on one genre such as horror, gore or Science Fiction Scarlet covers all manner of cinematic subjects with an eye on significant themes, concepts and ideas.



It also offers some of the best coverage of earlier films I have seen with a near encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of cinema.

Scarlet opens with some letters and then offers an excellent study of music in horror films called "The Music of the Night", this issue it is focused on the music of the composer Max Steiner.

We are then treated to a range of reviews of books and DVDs, as part of the DVD review section there is a solid "Poe on DVD" article which comprehensively covers the known (and lesser known) DVDs on Edgar Allan Poe.

The coverage within the general reviews section is excellent from modern to classic; re-releases to new titles, there are lots of older films which I have not found reviewed anywhere else.

The articles in this issue focus on The Mummy and are really quite superb, tracing the Mummy genre from the earliest films right through to the most recent release.

There are in-depth discussions of key films such as The Mummy (1932) and lots of rare stills and images.

This is followed by a very cool interview with Jimmy Baird who was a well known juvenile star appearing in such films as The Return of Dracula and To Hell and Back.

The Mummy theme is continued with articles on unusual Mummy themed films (illustrated with some great humour) and Mummy special effects and make-up.

If this is not enough, we are treated to feature length articles on invisibility in film and Psycho. Scarlet Issue 2 is illustrated throughout with rare stills, photographs, art and illustrations.

It really is an absolute gem and a magazine no film buff can be without.

Van Helsing's Journal Issue #10 Scarlet Media

Van Helsing's Journal is a bi-annual magazine published by Scarlet Media, the same firm which produces Scarlet Magazine.



It is a very different sort of film magazine in that it focuses on in depth feature length articles which cover major historical and thematic aspects of cinema.

Rather than focusing on the latest Hollywood whizz bang release, it looks at classic films with references to literature, myth, legend and history. It is erudite and informative as well as entertaining.

Issue Ten includes some superb articles, all illustrated with rare stills, pics and images.

Carmilla looks at both the novella and the various film adaptations of this classic vampire tale while Lugosi in London continues a fascinating ongoing look at Bela Lugosi in London and in this article on his encounter with an elderly music hall artiste.

This is followed by a very comprehensive study of the screenplays of Dylan Thomas and an absolutely gorgeous pictorial tribute to Aztec Mummy films.

There is an interview with Bret Wood who coordinates the classic film releases at Kino Entertainment and a selection of very informed DVD

reviews covering everything from the last horrors to re-releases of classics with an emphasis on classics and older titles.

Once again Van Helsing's Journal offers an informed view of cinema which is informative, intelligent and entertaining. It is visually appealing and packed with surprising content which, unlike so many other cinema magazines, places a high value on classic cinema.

Van Helsing's Journal is bi-annual, to purchase email the editor for details. Again, this is another unique cinema magazine which is worth spending the time to get a copy of.

Email: harryhlong@yahoo.com

Withersin's Unkindness Anthology #1 Withersin Magazine Web: <http://withersin.com>

Withersin is a quirky sort of magazine, very hard to pin down. Most issues include all manner of darker content from short stories to interviews, informative articles to reviews. It is idiosyncratic and seems to be very much the personal vision of the editor.

The themed issues are especially unusual and cover all manner of subjects from Life and Bone to Flesh, it is always beautifully presented with a superb cover.

The latest issue is an anthology of fiction and includes thirteen marvelously dark tales, all with a twist, each unique in its own way.

It has a forward by Bizarro author, D. Harlan Wilson and also includes an interview with maverick alternative historian Graham Hancock.



MUSIC & COMEDY IN REVIEW



Frank Skinner Stand Up – Live Universal R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

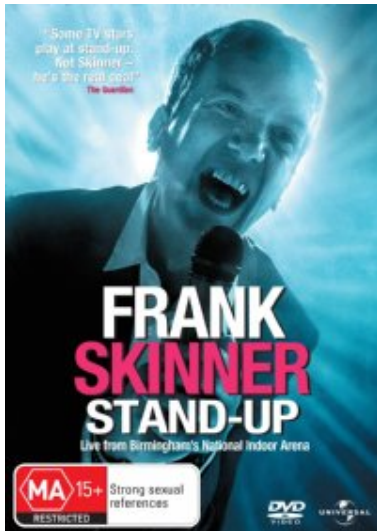
Real name Chris Collins, Frank Skinner is a British stand-up comedian. Judging by the size of the crowd he has drawn in his native Birmingham in this DVD (the show dates back to 1992), he is a very popular comedian.

He has been doing comedy since 1985 and his experience shows in what is a very confident presentation style.

He has a fair amount of TV experience, both writing and acting, but since I haven't seen any of his shows I can't comment on them. In his last British tour all sixty nine of his shows sold out, and that's comment enough.

Frank is not brash and outspoken. He is rather restrained and even a little sad, as the main theme of his act is his midlife crisis and the changes to his sex life now he has passed fifty.

Frank Skinner—Impressively honest and funny about sex without becoming Tasteless..



A word of warning here: Frank's monologue is often about sex, and he gets quite down to earth sometimes, but he doesn't slip over the edge

Although some of the situations he discusses could be offensive, he never loses sight of the need to be funny, not dirty. What, for instance, are the pitfalls of leaving your shirt on during sex?

Frank is not a brash one-liner comedian in the American style. He goes into a subject in fair detail, and his act is very visual. He has a rather large stage and manages to use every bit of it during the performance.

I think he has that British gift of being able to gradually build up a sense of the ridiculous in small steps, leading to a hilarious punch line.

His timing and gestures are perfect, his delivery is clear and free of unnecessary swearing (something he is becoming passionate about).

He is really a pleasure to watch in action, and he is genuinely funny, and I didn't find his act the least bit offensive.

I enjoyed every minute of his show, and was pleasantly surprised when he returned to the stage when I thought it was over, to do his tribute song to Osama bin Laden (in George Formby style complete with banjo).

And then he came back again to discuss Granny Sex videos. Now, that should be getting pretty tasteless, but with Frank it worked.



So don't be put off by the main subject matter – just sit back and enjoy a really good comedian.

Frank Skinner Stand Up is available as a very reasonably priced DVD from Universal Australia. It generally retails under \$20.00

**Keating:
The Musical
Madman
Ent. 2008
R4 DVD**

Keating: The Musical is Australian political satire at its very best, combining superb musical numbers, a biting sense of humour and an intricate knowledge of Australian politics.



It originally appeared at the 2005 Melbourne International Comedy Festival and Casey Bennett teamed up with director Neil Armfield to make his outlandish and witty musical bigger and better than ever for the 2008 August broadcast of the show on the ABC.

It certainly cannot be said to be unbiased, it is unashamedly pro Keating and pro Labour but after so many years of John Howard, it is difficult not to look back at this period with some reverence.

The Caricatures vary in quality and at times the show is a little "uneven". I found Bob Hawke, portrayed as a sort of comic show host, the least credible, while Hewson, Downer, Keating and Howard were top notch. The image of the bumbling John Howard was so true to form it was the most cutting of all.

The musical numbers are all of good quality; some certainly stand out above others. The most memorable, in my mind anyway, include the Keating - Hewson number "I want to do you slowly", Alexander Downer in Drag singing Freaky (a reference to the time he wore stockings to a children's charity fundraiser in 1996) and the amazing Evans-Kernot romantic interlude. The last was even more amusing considering Kernot was sitting in the audience, squirming no doubt !

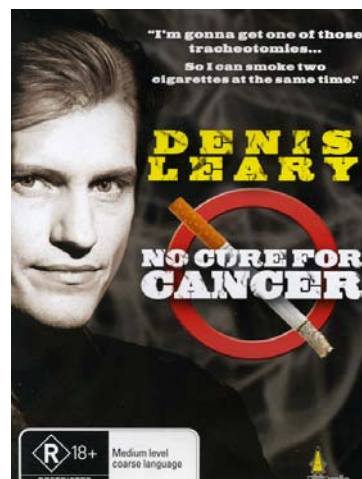
John Howard singing about his great lust for power, indeed, the whole John Howard sequence involving his various personas as would be military man, farmer and "man of the people" is incredibly funny and rather insightful.

This is an outstanding musical and while it takes a little while for the first act to get going, from

about 20 minutes on in it reaches its stride and amuses, entertains and even educates right until the end. The intelligence of the writing is remarkable; here is a musical which documents one of the more tumultuous periods in Australian political life with humour, wit and, at times, with remarkable sensitivity and pathos.

**No Cure For
Cancer
Denis Leary
Umbrella Ent.
R4 DVD**

No Cure for Cancer is one of Denis Leary's more famous stand-up routines from the early 1990's. It was made into a Showtime special and is now released in Australia by Umbrella with a film-clip of his most famous song "Asshole".



Leary is cantankerous, obnoxious and outrageous; his humour is confronting and certainly not politically correct. At the same time you quickly realize what Leary is not, he is not sexist, racist or homophobic.

He is a new generation of cutting edge comedians which while being more than willing to offend have a deeper appreciation to the new social agenda, for example, his section on men having trouble crying and the birth of his child is genuinely touching and his attack on the "feel sorry for itself" generation which lives for therapy and rehab, ignoring personal responsibility is actually rather insightful.

Leary, however, also has no time for political correctness and brazenly attacks those who wish to control the lives of others. His favourite subjects seem to be drugs, cigarette smoking, meat eating and therapy. His comedy seems to solidly rooted in a "libertarian" worldview and he rails against those who wish to curtail the freedom of others and this is sadly a growing trend around the world today.

He peppers his humour with outrageous and at times deliberately extreme comments about various musicians and personalities.

At one stage he asks God why John Lennon was shot and yet Yoko Ono was spared to continue inflicting us with her music and reminds us that one good thing in the Eighties was that we ended up with one less Bee Gee !

Leary has a truly vicious tongue and an acerbic dry wit and yet there is more than just humour here, a lot of his observations have a ring of truth to them and make you consider the importance of both individual freedom and responsibility.

Above All No Cure for Cancer is great entertainment and will provide more laughs per minute than you will have had for quite some time...

Web: <http://www.umbrellaent.com.au>

Songs to Bleed To Deathbed Repentance

Songs to Bleed to is a marvellously gothic and melancholic album, mixing metal, industrial and gothic sounds into a powerful and visceral musical experience.



The songs range from strong confronting metal sounds such as in the Blood of the Marquis to more "Marilyn Manson" like in America is a drug. 'The God I Never Had' is an especially resonant song reflecting on the inanities of religious belief.

There is also a very cool remake of the song God by Tori Amos.

Songs to Bleed To is musically a professional and polished work, packed with excellent driving metal and rock, superb vocals and a dark mood which envelops the listener.

It is a quite a diverse package with many different styles and fascinating lyrics which are powerfully evocative.

It also features superb artwork by Kevin Hundsnerscher of model Vienna la Rouge in dark and gothic moods.

Web: <http://deathbedrepentance.net>

The Crying Light Antony and the Johnsons Virgin Music 2009 EMI Music



Antony and the Johnsons are one of the more unusual musical experiences of recent years. Antony Hegarty's voice is haunting, sensitive and unearthly.

At times it seems even angelic as it lifts up the listener to great heights and at other times it is pained and full of deep and angst ridden emotion. He truly uses his voice as an instrument and has quite an astounding range, though with an unusual sound.

The lyrical quality of all their albums are also just as impressive, covering a range of significant issues. I Am a Bird Now was a powerfully exploration of the diversity of both sexuality and gender while The Crying Light seems to focus more on environmental issues.

However, this is a album different in sound from earlier releases, it is carefully textured and at times borders on classical, it allows the vocals to stand alone with minimal accompaniment primarily using piano and an orchestra as a background.

There are some more mainstream sounding tracks such as Epilepsy Is Dancing but generally this is a sombre even melancholic album, not surprising it is reflecting on the state of the world and man's place within it.

But don't let that put you off, there is immense beauty in this album and poetry in its lyrics, the more you play it, the more you will find it a truly moving experience.

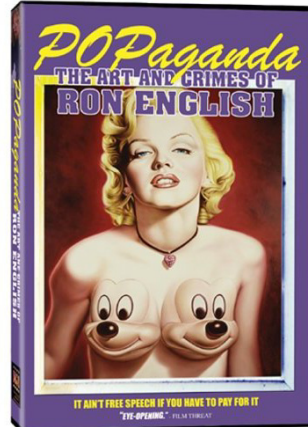


Antony

ART & ARTISTS



Popaganda
The Art and Crimes of
Ron English
All Region NTSC
Cinema Libre
Studio



Popaganda is a comprehensive examination of the life and work of guerrilla artist Ron English by Pedro Carvajal.

In the American guerrilla and radical art movements there are many ways to express their shared contempt for consumerism and the way in which advertising has destroyed the American way of life. For many it is in the form of graffiti art, for the most daring, it is through the liberation of billboards. Such use ranges from simple defacing or transformation of key elements (by such groups as the Billboard Liberation Front) to the total replacement of a billboard with one that has an ironic or cynical twist.

This is where Ron English comes into his own, nobody has created the sort of unique Billboard art that English has created. By taking cultural icons such as Ronald McDonald and Joe Camel and subverting them he is able to bring attention to the pitfalls of capitalism gone wild. In terms of Ronald McDonald he created an extremely obese McDonald icon which brought attention to the fat content in their food; it was made famous in Morgan Spurlock's Super Size Me.

He took special issue with what he saw as the advertising of cigarettes to children and used his artistic talent to take direct action against the Joe Camel advertising campaign. His replacement billboards caused such a stir among the young bringing to their attention the relationship between smoking and cancer and making it clear that smoking was not cool. English's Camel billboards were so successful that it is believed that the original advertising campaign lost most of its effectiveness.

His work is multifaceted and includes amazing

oil paintings, posters and album covers. All of his art subverts cultural icons from Homer Simpson to Kiss, Ronald McDonald to Marilyn Monroe to say something about our modern culture and its obsessions. While many artists would simply use their "new found infamy" as a spring board to develop their career. English has continued to work with billboards and radical cultural subversion believing this to be a significant part of his self expression.

While at times he is warned by both his wife and art dealer that he should spend more time on his commercial painting, he is driven to express his views in the public arena. He even went on a television show where he promised his wife he would not paint another billboard for twelve months, he lasted two weeks !

He has had many legal problems including a short stint in jail as hijacking a billboard is seen as a second degree felony, it seems advertising is taken very seriously in America.

This film offers a very professional form of documentary filmmaking which is direct and honest. It shows English warts and all - doing his art, putting up his billboards, issues at home with his wife about what he does and his artistic process.

This is a superbly "fly on the wall" doco which makes you feel like you have become part of his life for 80 minutes.

The DVD is also packed with extras including various commentaries, a comprehensive gallery, excellent featurettes including one on his Gnostic art series and work with the Dandy Warhols, music videos and lots more. There is also internet content which can be accessed online.

The menu is nicely done as a virtual museum which offers the various options through select pieces of Ron English's art.

Cinema Libre Studio

Web: <http://www.cinematlibrestudio.com>

COMICS IN REVIEW



The Asylum of Horrors No.1 Asylum Press 208



The Asylum of Horrors is a high quality horror comic packed with a diverse range of stories, comic styles and forms. It includes about a dozen impressive tales which range from traditional occult fare through to the exploration of the dark and fractured nature of the human psyche. Littered throughout are one page images which focus on various characters and events in a mental institution. This is certainly not mainstream horror - but visceral, gory and edgy.

The stories vary in quality and offer many different storytelling styles, the artwork is universally impressive, ranging from detailed black and white to luxurious colour and even a number when are "photo realistic".

Some of the stories have a traditional occult horror background such as "Ruined Earth" with its dark exploration of the underworld and Lovecraftian themes, while others mix occultism with sex and desire such as in "Caveat Emptor".

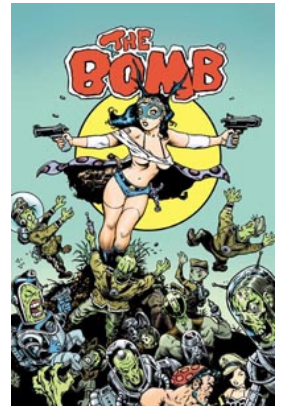
One of the more compelling aspects of The Asylum of Horrors is its strongly psycho-thriller tales which range from "Love or Obsession", a tale of jealousy gone way beyond safe limits to "Baazumatuu" where nightmares and madness meet. The various one page images which explore madness, medicine gone wrong and mental institutions are especially good.

There are also tales which fall into the dark fantasy category such as "The Dollhouse" which are intriguing and very satisfying.

I found the first issue of The Asylum of Horrors an excellent read. It offers a diverse range of content, many different styles, superior artwork and a solid dose of horror with some fantasy and psychological thrillers thrown in for good measure.

Web: [http:// www.asylumpress.com/](http://www.asylumpress.com/)

The Bomb Steve Mannion Asylum Press 2008



The reprint edition of the Bomb is a superb collection of issues 1-4 of Steve Mannion's The Bomb as well as The Bomb Swimsuit Edition.

It is some 176 pages in length and includes a 16 page colour section. Steve Mannion has created some truly bizarre and outrageous female characters, each with their own strange and unusual talents and style as well as their fascinating back stories and lifestyles.

The artistic style of Mannion is very rather impressive, it has incredibly complex line work and superb detail and is noted for witty and amusing writing, strange if not perverse plots and some truly outrageous characters, ranging from Fearless Dawn to Sea Goin' Lil, Brown-hole Jones to Helga Von Krause and not to forget the good looking but not too bright Jungle Chick. The action comes thick and fast from naughty pirates to Nazis, escaped prisoners and lots more. The stories are well developed and include all sorts of bizarre plots and unusual twists and turns. Some are simply for fun while others have a bit more depth, all have a wicked sense of play and are well presented.

Stories like Jungle Chick and the Dinosaur are just plain hilarious.

This is a great compilation with some great full length tales and stories which are truly madcap adventures coupled with the swimsuit edition which offers some truly awesome one page tales and illustrations. Of course, we really cannot write a review of Mannion's work with mentioning the dark sense of humour that always informs his work and the beauty of the babes.

Web: [http:// www.asylumpress.com/](http://www.asylumpress.com/)

**The Leather Nun and
other Incredibly
Strange
Comics**
**Paul Gravett and
Peter Stanbury**
Aurum Press 2008

**Australian
Distributor:
Bookwise
International**



While most people have heard of Batman and Spiderman, the Fantastic Four and Superman, there is another world of comics, a strange world where things are never what they seem. In this world anything goes and the content can range from “publicity” comics promoting prunes and oranges to health titles decrying the evils of smoking and the value of condoms.

There are strange religious titles covering everything from the life of Hansi who discovers the evils of Nazism and an evangelical Gospel Blimp to very graphic depictions of hell.

Of course, these are only the tip of the iceberg, there is a more underground world, which is filled with bizarre and perverse titles which generally were “one-off” releases, not surprising considering their content.

Such titles featured every manner of perverse sex with such strange titles as The Leather Nun, Blinky Bill and the Virgin Mary, Amputee Love and what can we add to the title “Trucker Fags In Denial” ?

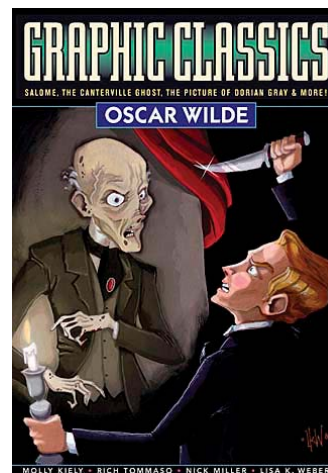
In this world superheroes come in very different configurations, there is a large fat man who transforms into a flying saucer, a hip-hop crime fighter and a supersized basketball player and we should not forget La Donna Ragna, a rather obvious Italian porno-horror copy of Spider-Man.

The Leather Nun and other incredibly strange comics is a superbly presented volume with a full size colour cover of each comic with an accompanying summary of each comic and extra images.

It includes some sixty one rare and unusual comics and will be a joy for any comic book lover.

Graphics Classics: Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde is considered one of the greats of modern literature, his wit, humour and style were of such proportions that it is difficult to know whether his life reflected his art or vice versa.



Even when his life took devastating turns, due to prejudice and bigotry, he still managed to sustain a sense of wit and humour, even the transcripts of his court case are an amusing read !

At times however Wilde’s life seems to overshadow his work, many are well aware of his personal tastes and struggles and yet today few have actually sat down and read his works. This is quite a shame because Wilde is quite an amazing author and whether you start with his one line witticisms, poetry, plays or stories you will be challenged, entertained and amused.

I always admire Graphic Classics as they bring significant fiction and present it in the form of comics and illustration for modern readers from teens to adult.

Each volume features the works of the world's greatest authors, using various illustrators and different graphic styles to communicate to the contemporary reader. They are superbly presented with beautiful covers and with a diverse range of tales and stories.

In this especially impressive volume there is a superb selection of Wilde’s work from an excerpt from the melancholic Ballad of Reading Gaol to some of Wilde’s key witticisms. The bulk of the book is focused on four tales, each superbly adapted and nicely illustrated.

We are first treated to the quintessential gothic tale of The Picture of Dorian Grey. A story of narcissism and obsession which has triggered countless literary and cinematic adaptations.





This is followed by the wickedly funny gothic satire *The Canterville Ghost* and then Lord Arthur Saville's *Crime*, a darkly humorous look at high society and its hypocrisy and the book is completed by Wilde's outrageous take on the Biblical story of *Salome*.

Graphic Classics: Oscar Wilde offers a diverse selection of Wilde's different styles from horror to satire, dark humour to the uniquely one-off work of *Salome*.

It is always hard to know what to choose to include in a selection of Wilde's work, this is a nice balance with two very major works (*Dorian Grey* and *Salome*) and a couple of his more satirical and humorous tales.

This is some 140 pages in length and offers very comprehensive coverage of each tale. It is a joyful celebration of everything Wilde !

Graphic Classics

Web: <http://www.graphicclassics.com>

While you are there have a look at their other titles—they are offered at very good internet only prices !!



Pride High Comic Series

Web: <http://pridecomics.com>

Pride High is an award-winning independent comic book about a gay-straight alliance at a high school for super-powered youth, it is pro-

duced in colour with high quality art and an engaging storyline.

The story takes place at the Poseidon Preparatory Academy for Heroic Youth, a boarding school for super-powered teens located in the fictional West Coast metropolis of Pacific City, California.



Pride High is produced in both a print and digital format and as a way to encourage those on limited incomes and the expansion of LGBT comics, is available in web comic format from their website. Pride High also likes to encourage reader participation and includes superhero cameos in each issue, while everybody obviously cannot be featured; there are cameos in each issue, as well as recurring guest star roles. In fact, as of Issue 3, one of the main characters is a reader creation. His character also graces the cover of Issue 4! All you have to do is register on our forums, introduce yourself, then add a character to the Student and Faculty Registry.

The high point of the Pride High series is the ability to develop believable characters. Each one is carefully fleshed out in a way that is very credible, their individual life experiences, joys and difficulties as well as their relationships are handled in an authentic manner.

Significant issues such as oppression are handled well but we are "not beaten over the head" with long dialogue and discussions, each word is well used and the images themselves are allowed to tell the tale and entertainment is not sacrificed for ideology.

Pride High is unusual in that while it may seem focused on LGBT teens, it really reaches out to a wide and diverse range of readers.

Previews can be found at:
<http://pridecomics.com/previews.html>



**il "GATTO" a
NOVE CODE**